

Bulletin, 1932, no. 11

THE HOUSE



OF THE PEOPLE

*AN ACCOUNT OF
MEXICO'S NEW SCHOOLS OF ACTION*

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Below, rural school teacher distributing books to children; above, adults studying.



THE
HOUSE OF THE PEOPLE

*AN ACCOUNT OF
MEXICO'S NEW SCHOOLS OF ACTION*

BY KATHERINE M. COOK

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
OFFICE OF EDUCATION,
Washington, December, 1932.

SIR: Herewith is a manuscript entitled "The House of the People." It presents an account of the educational experiment in progress in Mexico. In that country, where some 90 per cent of the people are either Indian or of Indian origin, very little of what we would call "progress" can be found. Although Mexico has accepted some of our ideas and practices in government and business, and although the common language Spanish is in use among a high percentage of the people, traditional native customs and standards of living still prevail. It remained for Dr. Moisés Sáenz to really find a type of education which would suit these people.

Mrs. Katherine M. Cook, who handles the special problems division in the Office of Education, decided to become more or less familiar with the indigenous people problem herself since we were unable, because of the depression, to employ a specialist in this field. In the summer of 1931 she went to Alaska, where she inspected the educational system there rather thoroughly. After her experiences in Alaska she went into Mexico and studied first hand the educational system established there largely through the efforts of Doctor Sáenz. This manuscript presents a brief discussion of what she saw in Mexico and somewhat of her evaluation of it. It is issued in the hope that it will stimulate more study of educational systems among primitive peoples. The people of the United States face difficult problems in their efforts toward establishing adequate educational systems adapted to the needs of different minority groups in continental United States and in some of its out-lying parts. It is hoped that this study may be suggestive in our search for fundamental solutions.

I recommend that it be published as a bulletin of this office.

Respectfully submitted,

Wm. JOHN COOPER,
Commissioner.

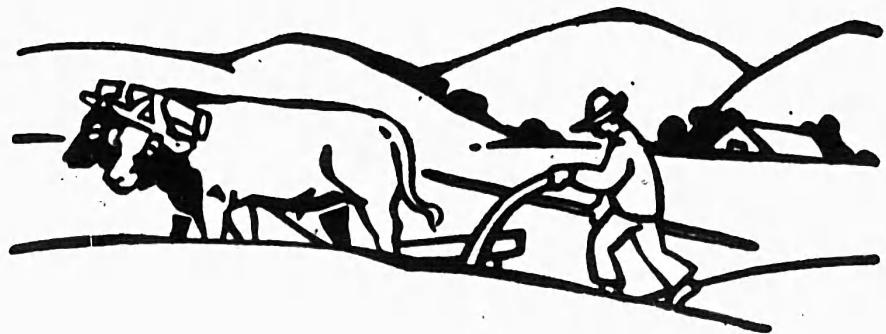
The SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This is Bulletin 1932, No. 11, and is issued by the United States Department of the Interior, Office of Education. Ray Lyman Wilbur is Secretary of the Interior and William John Cooper is Commissioner of Education.

Katherine M. Cook, the author of this Bulletin, is chief of the division of special problems.

*The illustrations at the beginning of each chapter are from woodcuts used to illustrate a series of readers prepared especially for the rural schools of Mexico by Prof. Rafael Ramirez. The series called *El Sembrador*—The Sower—includes four books corresponding roughly to our first, second, third, and fourth readers.*



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INTRODUCTION



THERE ARE a number of reasons for the increasing interest of American educators in educational progress in Mexico. Mexico is one of our two nearest neighbors, and for that reason alone everything that contributes to her welfare is important to us.

From a more definitely educational standpoint we are concerned because of the large number of Mexican children enrolling in our schools, especially in the Southwestern States. Experience shows that many of these Mexican children learn to speak our language and become assimilated into our social and political life only at the expense of much time and effort on the part of our schools. We are beginning to realize that a wider knowledge of their country and of their cultural background and their social situation at home might lead to a better understanding of their needs and abilities. Adequate appreciation of the Mexicans might eventually lead to provision for more appropriate education for Mexican children in the United States, wherever they are living, permanently or temporarily.

Of special interest to us, too, is Mexico's rather new experiment with the education of her large native population. In this field she is making a fine effort to solve a problem with which we have long been concerned in continental United States and in our several outlying parts, namely, the social and economic upbuilding through education of native peoples having different origins and traditions and speaking different native languages. This effort is of greater interest since Mexico,

like the United States, is a republic made up of a Federal union of States. It is therefore dependent, as we are, for good government on the intelligence of the people as a whole. Mexico is beginning to understand and appreciate the close relationship between education and popular government. In this respect the nation seems to be satisfying the same need which prompted the United States to adopt universal public education.

Nor has Mexico failed to be affected by the progressive movements in education which are having so profound an influence on our own schools. Indeed, it appears that our neighbors across the Rio Grande have read John Dewey and exponents of his school of thinking to good effect. According to Prof. Moisés Sáenz, John Dewey is gospel among Mexican teachers, even though some of them formerly thought of him as a man having a vague connection with the American Navy. "With his philosophy of socialization, with his emphasis on reality, on self-activity and self-expression," says Professor Sáenz, "Dewey became a watchword."

These and other very real and mutual interests in educational policies and practices prompted the preparation of this bulletin. It is, for the most part, an account of impressions gained during a month's observation and study among Mexican schools, chiefly rural schools. Federal school officials were guides and companions on school-visiting expeditions, explaining conditions and interpreting school policies and practices. Information furnished by these officials, often informally and in answer to direct inquiries, addresses presented by Federal officials during sessions of the fifth seminar conducted by the Committee on Cultural Relations with Latin America (copies or English translations were usually furnished by the speakers), and official reports and mimeographed materials furnished by the Director of Rural Schools of the Secretariat of Public Education have been drawn upon to verify or amplify observations and occasionally as source material for certain factual statements. No attempt is made to offer a complete treatment of the history and progress of any educational movement in Mexico. The author aims to describe certain outstanding features of the rural educational program which she observed and believes to be of special interest to educators in the United States. The larger and more important tendencies, observed with a desire to understand the spirit which animates the program rather than its details, are those with which this bulletin is primarily concerned.

CHAPTER ONE



RURAL SCHOOLS

SINCE 1920¹ a Federal system of rural schools looking toward extension on a nation-wide scale has been in the making in Mexico. It was stimulated and encouraged with the establishment in 1921 of a central education headquarters corresponding to what would in our country be a department of education. By 1924 the Federal system of schools was well under way.

Up to 1920, education outside the Federal District, which includes Mexico City, and the Territories had been chiefly a State responsibility. This establishment of a school system devoted to the education of the rural Indian population as a responsibility of the Federal Government is widely accepted as the most far-reaching educational contribution of the revolution of 1910 following the overthrow of the Diaz régime.

Beginning with a small staff and appropriation, the system has grown in scope and in number of schools. The number of schools is now estimated at 7,000. Neither the number of

¹ Sáenz, Moisés, and Priestley, Herbert L. *Some Mexican Problems. Lectures on the Harris Foundation*, 1926. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1926, p. 64.

schools nor the enrollment is commensurate with the need if universal education is the criterion. In 1926, the Subsecretary of Education estimated that only approximately 4 out of every 10 children were then in the public schools.² Yet it appears that the Federal schools in operation are so well distributed that their influence is nation-wide. Moreover, the requests coming in to central authorities for additional schools are in excess of Federal officials' ability to supply with the financial resources at present available.

Schools Adapted to Mexican Life

Like all schools, those in rural Mexico must be viewed in the light of the situation they are designed to meet, if their objectives and practices are to be understood. The rural population is, in the main, a native, peasant population made up of many groups representing different traits and stages of civilization and speaking many different dialects. Of Mexico's 14,000,000 inhabitants, at least 10,000,000 are said to be Indian, or mestizos with a strong mixture of Indian blood. The remainder are "whites or near whites."³

Mexico's culture is dominantly rural and handicraft. The industrial system which prevails in the United States and which has led to concentration of so large a part of its population in urban communities and to the almost universal use of machine-made materials is practically unknown in Mexico.

Doctor Tannenbaum estimates that approximately 80 per cent of the total population is predominantly rural, if the differentiation is made on the basis of "occupied places of less than 4,000 inhabitants."⁴ The greater part of the rural population lives in villages, probably as much as five-sixths of the total; the others are scattered in the mountains or on isolated farms. The villages are small, varying in population from 100 to 4,000, but averaging 300 to 500 population. Relatively few villages have more than a thousand people, while the number of villages is estimated at more than 62,000.⁵

In social organization the villages are of two types—the *hacienda* and the *ejido* or free community. The former is an integral part of a privately-owned plantation on which the

² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁴ Tannenbaum, Frank. *The Mexican Agrarian Revolution*. The Brookings Institution, Washington, D. C.

⁵ *Ibid.*

residents of the village are employed as laborers or on some contract basis. The latter is a communal village organized somewhat on the precolonial Aztec plan. The land is the property of an assignee so long as he lives on it and improves it. It can not be sold. Xochilmilco, the site of the well-known floating gardens near Mexico City, is an example of the *ejido*. Since the revolution this type of land ownership has become highly favored among a large part of the population, and a considerable number of large landholdings, some formerly held by non-resident owners, have been distributed among the rural population who now live in communities organized on the *ejido* plan.

There are many "petty industries" or handicrafts carried on throughout Mexico. In some regions several kinds of industries are carried on; in others there is considerable industrial or handicraft specialization. Serapes and other types of woven materials, baskets, pottery, tiles, tooled leather, hand-wrought silver, hats, and glass are typical products. In general, agriculture is carried on to supplement or be supplemented by any one or more of the handicrafts. Tools are generally simple—even primitive. Wooden plows, resembling Egyptian plows in old prints, are common in Mexico, and their use is an example of the historic methods employed in the varied industries carried on. Sewing machines are an exception to the prevailing lack of mechanical labor-saving devices. They can be found in most of the villages and seem to be the one kind of modern machinery which has gained favor in the country districts. In Mexico, regions—sometimes even villages—are practically self-sustaining. Imported goods are uncommon outside of the few large cities.

Clothes are of the simplest kind—a white-cotton pajama-style suit, a serape, and sombrero for the men; a simple 2-piece cotton dress and the prevailing *rebozo*—a long, narrow, usually dark-colored shawl—for the women. The Indian population goes barefoot. When shoes are worn—and apparently it is an economic question—they are very simple sandals, composed of leather soles, reasonably heavy, with heel and instep straps, alike for both men and women. In some of the leather-working centers more pretentious sandals, with elaborate straps of colored leather, are fashioned.

Life in Mexico is reduced to its simplest form. The Indian population raises and makes with its hands practically everything that it consumes. Needs—at least felt needs—are simple and elementary. One is constantly reminded of what Stuart

Chase⁶ tells about the "wantlessness" of the Mexican Indian, which he says is the despair of high-pressure salesmen, and of his "inertia" in resisting modern trade invasions.

Taste in housing is as simple as in clothes. Crude huts, made chiefly of the native bamboo with thatched roofs, are used in the tropical lowlands—the *tierra caliente*. Many have but one room, which answers all purposes for the family. Adobe huts, sometimes with thatched roofs, sometimes with tiled roofs, are found on the plateau. In the larger villages long, flat adobe houses are built around a compound. The more pretentious houses are usually built around a patio. Practically all homes in the country are of local materials, generally of the kinds found in or close to the local community.

Mexican villages are much alike in appearance, allowing for the differences based on climatic conditions, and the people are much alike in manner of living and of making a living. They differ widely in traits, in traditions and customs, and especially in language. At least 50 different native dialects are in use. Spanish is accepted as the common language, although in many Indian villages, especially those remote from centers of population, only the native tongue is used. Many, however, speak two languages, Spanish and Aztec, for example, or whatever the native tongue may be.

The economic level is low throughout rural Mexico. Yet there is apparent agreement among experienced observers that the Mexican people have "an undeniable artistic temperament, refined and modernized by the Spanish crossing," a certain genius for color, a quaint sense of humor, skill in the handicrafts, and an "ever-present sense of racial pride."

This, briefly, is the situation which the new rural schools are established to improve. Indians are said to have a strong sense of community, since Aztec and colonial civilizations both fostered community organization. There is also a strong desire for education. "Land and justice" was the slogan of the revolution. Thousands of men responsible for its success came from villages in which schools had never existed, and learned through the revolution something of the importance of the education of which they had been deprived. These two qualities—a certain community solidarity and a desire to improve their social situation—are, no doubt, responsible in a large measure for the rapid extension of rural schools.

⁶ Mexico: A Study of Two Americas. By Stuart Chase in collaboration with Marion Tyler. New York, The Macmillan Co.

How the Rural Schools are Established

In the beginning "missionaries" were sent out by the Secretariat of Public Education to travel from village to village throughout the country "to preach the gospel of the new school, to invigorate the people, and to tell them about the new day."¹ When the community became aroused to the need, a school was established with a teacher selected from the community. The teacher's salary was paid by the Federal Government. "No equipment was sent; no city teachers. Thus the new school came into existence, a school which has no pedagogy, a school with a strong social sense; with no normal training; without a tradition."²

The program once under way, further efforts to arouse communities became less necessary—increasingly now the establishment of schools can await a demand for them on the part of the communities. According to present practice, the Federal Government establishes the schools and furnishes teachers, but does so on condition that the request for the school comes from the community with the assurance that the community will share the responsibility of building and maintaining it. Teachers are recruited from the region or the community itself—preferably from the community if a qualified resident is available.

In initiating and maintaining the ambitious program of supplying schools of a new type to its several million rural indigenous people³ Mexico was fortunate in many respects. There were no hard and fast traditions concerning the purposes and practices of public schools to follow, nor fixed prejudices to overcome. Elaborate and expensive buildings and equipment were not essential in the new program. Climatic conditions favored and custom approved the use of the simple building materials which were at hand. More important still, the educational leadership responsible for the program was free to establish new principles and policies and to proceed along lines designed to meet specific needs as they understood and interpreted them. For example, the principle of self-help, deemed important by the leaders, is exemplified in the policy set up by the Federal Government of establishing schools only

¹ Sáenz, Moisés. *Newer Aspects of Education in Mexico*. Bulletin of the Pan American Union, 63: 861-77, September, 1929.

² Dr. Moisés Sáenz estimates that there are "four million Indians and six million mestizo peasants—ten million human beings who have been heretofore a negligible factor in Mexican life." *Bulletin of the Pan American Union*, 3: 864, September, 1929.

as cooperative enterprises. This principle, established in the beginning, is still followed.

When a community wants a school it must share responsibility for securing and maintaining it. First, it must donate the site, furnish the materials, and usually build and furnish the schoolhouse under direction of the teacher. Materials are at hand—mud for adobe bricks, clay for tiles for the roof, and native woods or materials suitable for the simple equipment. The Federal Government, on its part, pays the teacher, who is native to the community or region, and the school may begin at once, even while the building is in progress of construction.

Second, in the maintenance of the school the community must give its moral support; that is, it must show a spirit of interest in the school as a community project, accept the leadership of the Federal officials and the teacher, and see that attendance of both children and adults is satisfactory. The Federal Government furnishes leadership, stimulation, and supervision.

Curriculum Making a Cooperative Project

The aim of the whole educational program is the "cultural incorporation" of the rural native population into Mexican life. The specific aim of the school itself, which is, of course, the local interpretation of the general aim, is gradually to bring about a changed environment, social and economic, and improved methods of living. The curriculum through which this aim is to be achieved is neither imposed nor prescribed by a central authority. It is not desk made; not the product of committees of teachers or of subject-matter specialists. School work, day by day, is designed to contribute to the social and economic welfare of the community through activities growing out of its specific and immediate needs. The teacher-leader is in the main responsible for the selection and conduct of school projects and community activities under the guidance and supervision of the centrally selected education officials.

In so far as possible, community problems are attacked in the order of their importance. If they are concerned with sanitation—a pure-water supply, for example—then the people will be taught the need of pure water, the mysteries of filtration, and how to make a stone filter. The teacher is there to help them to make and use the necessary equipment. If smallpox is a recurring plague in the region, the need of vaccination

must be taught and the teacher himself and leaders whom he instructs vaccinate the community. The use of other simple medicines may be taught at the same time, and a medicine cabinet or a small drug store installed in the schoolroom or in the community. The motive for the installation of a medicine cabinet or for teaching modern methods of medical treatment is found in some recognized community need.

Frequently the first school project directed to meet the community need is concerned more directly with the economic situation. The need of improving local practice in agriculture, or improving the quality of the product of the local industry or the means of marketing it—pottery, weaving, basketry, leather work—may take first place. This need then enters into and becomes the basis of the school curriculum. Often housing conditions must be improved; carpentry then becomes part of the school curriculum. Generally the school must encourage a varied diet and through the school garden help to cultivate a taste for a variety of vegetables, as well as demonstrate better methods of raising them. Projects selected and carried on are designed to improve the specific local situation. The needs are many, of course, and several practical activities are usually under way at the same time.

While the school activities grow quite literally out of community needs, there is considerable unity among schools in program content and in school practices. This unity is in part due to centralized supervision, which, because the program is flexible and experimental, is quick to use and pass on the results of successful experience. If a project carried on by a rural teacher proves effective in securing results and fills a need common to other communities, Federal supervisors promote its extension among other rural schools. The school garden is an example. The first one was established on the initiative of a teacher as a means of teaching the community to raise and use a greater variety of vegetables. It proved highly successful, and now every rural school has a garden. The first open-air theater was the idea of a rural teacher who used it as a means of helping the community to understand the social work of the school. The innovation was encouraged by officials of the Secretariat of Public Education, with the result that more than half the schools now have open-air theaters as part of their equipment. The open-air theater is a means of teaching the community essential health or economic lessons, as well as a means to recreation.

School projects initiated by teachers sometimes grow into larger social policies which become nation-wide in scope. The campaign in many rural communities to overcome the excessive use of alcohol was initiated by a teacher in his community where there was a real need for reform. Because of his success other teachers were encouraged to promote the movement, and the campaign at present is country-wide, sponsored by the Federal health department as well as by the schools.

The common purpose of the school program of improving the community socially and economically and the fact that communities have many problems in common are potent unifying influences. Every rural school has a playground devoted to community recreation. Music, dramatics, and games (generally basket ball) are taught in every school. In every rural school there is a workshop housed separately or in a corner of the schoolroom. Health instruction—"how to eat, and the manner of living in a civilized community"; sanitation, usually taught through a community project, such as providing a pure water supply; the "popular arts," usually including drawing, painting, design, and some of the handicrafts; physical education, and agriculture are other basic subjects in the program. Practically all schools maintain small drug stores, teach the use of simple remedies, particularly those for intestinal diseases, and vaccinate the people when necessary. Ability to speak the basic language, Spanish, with ease and facility is a felt need essential to social and economic progress. It is therefore logically a basic objective in every school's program.

In curriculum content and in school practices the rural schools aim to reflect national ideals—another unifying influence. This attitude is perhaps best illustrated by the emphasis which the school program is placing on the revival of interest in pre-Hispanic culture. Decorative designs and hand-woven fabrics long neglected are being sought out and their use revived by the schools and by skilled workers. Traditional dances and festivals, all kinds of folk ways and folklore are being preserved or revived; old handicrafts are being revived and improved upon through the efforts of the cultural missions, the rural normal schools, and the teachers. The permanent cultural missions are particularly active in seeking out source materials for such phases of the school and community work.

The schools' emphasis on reviving indigenous culture is a reflection of the policy of the national régime in Mexico, which is one of "cultural incorporation" of the indigenous popula-

tion. It aims to build on the Indians' traditional culture, to preserve his self-respect, and to use his hereditary talents. Any type of segregation is looked upon with disfavor. In 1923 the reestablished Secretariat of Public Education included a Bureau of Cultural Incorporation of the Indigenous Population, organized to promote the policy and to further the objectives indicated. This, however, was later merged with and its responsibilities were assumed by the Department of Rural Schools, an interesting expression of popular confidence in the efficiency and scope of the rural-school program.

It is interesting to North American observers that neither among Federal education officials nor teachers does one see or hear much about efforts to eliminate illiteracy, a matter so absorbing in our own country. Instruction in the fundamentals is, of course, important in the schools for the children and for the adults who desire it in and out of school hours. But one has the feeling that it is more or less incidental to the main purpose. The need of ability to read and write is not yet urgent. There is faith on the part of education officials that it will come naturally and be recognized without great effort as communities progress toward a higher social level.

School Practices and Teaching Methods

In methods of presentation as in content of the school program, particularly when it is concerned with community activities, general or specialized, with sanitation and health, with projects in gardening, chicken raising, and the like, one finds initiative, freedom from formality, opportunity for self-expression, learning by doing. There is an understanding of the school's relationship to and responsibility for social and individual growth. Here indeed the term so common in Mexico, schools of action (*escuelas de accion*), is applicable. In these practical activities one finds the very essence of reality. The schools are free from the "play acting and sight-seeing" which some observers consider weaknesses of our own progressive schools.⁹

Spanish in non-Spanish-speaking communities, recognized as a vital and immediate need, is taught through songs—and Mexican children are especially fond of music; through dram-

⁹ Bode, Boyd H. *Education at the Crossroads*. *Progressive Education*, 9: 543-49, November, 1931.

atization, in which they are graceful, original, and adept, especially dramatization of simple village and farm activities; through programs of plays, dances, and the like. In short, in the recognized "practical" subjects one finds in Mexican rural schools, as Doctor Sáenz tells us, "all of Dewey—not so much as an accomplished fact as a poignant tendency."¹⁰

School Buildings and Equipment

School administration is apparently simplified in the rural education program, at least one hears little about it, especially from the point of view of local finance. School buildings are built and equipped without cost to the Federal Government, as has been explained before. They are of the simplest design. Sometimes an old church or abandoned building is used. Generally the schools are new, 1-story, rectangular, flat-roofed adobe structures, stuccoed and painted or whitewashed an immaculate white, with shining red-tiled roofs. Even as in our own country, especially in our small towns, the schoolhouse is apt to be the most attractive place in the village. Stuart Chase¹¹ says of it:

It is the most sanitary place in town. There may be no municipal building, no band stand, no iron balconies, no store, but increasingly there will be a school. Again and again, as the little square white building with its red-tiled roof shone out from the prevalent village gray or brown, I was reminded of my country. The outstanding piece of architecture in an American town is almost invariably the high school. Mexico, at a totally different economic level, is following the same trail.

One can easily pick them out—the schools—as he drives through the villages. Usually there is a door and a window in front—cross ventilation seems unnecessary in Mexico—and over the door the words, *Casa del Pueblo* (the house of the people). No name could more truly express the real purpose and function of the rural schools.

The furnishings of the schoolroom are as simple as the building itself; the benches, desks, sometimes tables and chairs and other simple furnishings, are homemade. Blackboards, globes, maps, teaching materials adequate in number or type were rarely seen. Occasionally there is a small blackboard painted

¹⁰ Sáenz, M. Newer Aspects of Education in Mexico. Bulletin of the Pan American Union, 63 : 861-77, September, 1929.

¹¹ Mexico: A Study of Two Americas. By Stuart Chase in collaboration with Marin Tyler. New York, The Macmillan Co.

on the wall or a separate one of the easel type. Often the walls of the schoolroom are decorated in vivid colors, the themes painted and designed by the children and the teachers. Walls are for use as well as for decoration. Sometimes the story being read in the lower grades was illustrated by a painting on the wall. In one school a chart used in studying poultry was painted on the wall of the schoolroom by teachers and pupils.

Books used in the rural schools, while not abundant, are interesting. Some are delightfully illustrated, and the lettering is often varied and pleasing. Generally they are furnished by the Secretariat of Public Education; some are published by the Federal Government. Many readers are written especially for rural schools by members of the staff of the Secretariat. Many are written by local educators. They are inexpensive but adequate in paper and binding, and the covers, in paper or cloth, are attractive in design and coloring. The illustrations are often typically Mexican in conception and spirit, although many resemble closely those found in readers in our own country.

One set of readers, prepared for the first four years of the rural elementary school by the Director of Rural Education of the Secretariat of Public Education, is apparently widely used and available at a minimum cost. The books are bound in paper but attractively illustrated and lettered.¹²

The first book, *Libro Primero*, contains 35 lessons and 50 pages. It is arranged in two parts. Part One is an adaptation of the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Part Two includes 18 lessons concerned chiefly with home and home duties, the school, national heroes, and lessons in patriotism. The lessons are preceded by a brief discussion of methods of presenting the lessons by the author, in which teachers are admonished to see that the children get the thought as a whole, avoiding word pronunciation; that the written and printed words are presented simultaneously. The need of phonic exercises is pointed out, and teachers are advised to exercise initiative in method and in overcoming individual difficulties.

Many schools have also an extra room adjacent to or near by the schoolhouse—*casa del maestro* (the teacher's house). Some of the teachers' homes are separate buildings and large enough to house several teachers. Even the smallest schools have workshops, either an extra room or a corner in the school-

¹² Illustrations used in this bulletin are from this series.

room. Chicken coops, rabbit pens, and gardens are outdoor equipment always found in the rural schools.

A few schools have demonstration farms of considerable size, and a model cottage is often built on the school ground. Here is a direct message to the Mexican child and adult. The model is simple, building materials are readily available, and some skill in building is an essential in every boy's education. Money is a relatively unimportant matter; improved facilities in arrangement, lighting, sanitation, and equipment are demonstrated in the model cottage. Typically it is a 3-room adobe, whitewashed, tile-roofed house. The rooms are the *sala*, or living room, a bedroom, and a kitchen, with a built-in combination stove and sink, also of native material, generally unglazed tiles. Houses of this kind will eventually, it is hoped, replace the prevailing 1-room type which answers all household purposes for the Indian family.

A representative rural school has one room occupied by approximately 40 children of all ages and both sexes. It offers a 4-year course, which will later be extended to 6 years. It has enough ground for a school garden and a plot for regular crops. Chicken runs, pigeon houses, rabbit coops, pigpens, and beehives are more or less common features. Soap making, pottery making, tanning, weaving, embroidery, carpentry, and other rural occupations form part of the program. At night the adults come to school—men and women. "It is one with the community. Sometimes we refer to the whole village itself as the schoolhouse."¹³

A rural teacher describes his school as follows:

The children's school now has a department of personal cleanliness, a medicine chest, a library, a little dark room for developing pictures, a chicken house and rabbit pen, a flower garden, a playground, an outdoor theater, and 3 hectares of crop land. When I arrived to take charge of the school the children sat on the floor or on stones which had been provided for that purpose. Now we do not have up-to-date furniture such as I hear called pedagogical, but we do have strong, comfortable benches and good tables for our work. All this our children have accomplished themselves, aided by the different organizations formed by me in the community.¹⁴

There are also in this school a string orchestra, recreation clubs for both children and adults, a school committee, a health and hygiene committee, among others, indicating the many ac-

¹³ Sáenz, Moisés. *Bulletin of the Pan American Union*, 63: 864-65, September, 1923.

tivities into which the school enters and in which it exerts its leadership.

The Teachers

In a very real sense the teacher is the school in Mexico. Teachers are selected by Federal education officials. The selection must be agreeable to the local school committee. One requisite is that they be residents of the region, preferably of the community, which the school serves. Their selection is dependent chiefly on certain personal qualities they are expected to possess—qualities of leadership, "common sense," as it is characterized in Mexico. This includes a fundamental belief in the education program, an understanding of the people among whom the teachers work, and consecration to the service in which they are engaged. Professional training is considered of secondary importance, and academic education need not extend beyond completion of the 6-year elementary school. Even ability to read and write is sufficient if personal qualities are superior or satisfactory. "The teachers are men and women of good will. Most of them have finished their primary education, but quite a few have not fulfilled any other requisite on the academic side than ability to read and write. But these teachers are physically and morally strong. They have an apostolic devotion to their work."¹⁴

This procedure in selecting teachers has been followed both from necessity and from choice. It was recognized that the program on its initiation called for a type of school quite different from the traditional one then in vogue, that a large number of teachers would be needed to begin with, and also that teachers must be employed in rapidly increasing numbers for some years to come. Not enough trained teachers were available to fill the positions open. Many teachers who were available had been trained under the old régime and for urban schools. It was feared that such teachers would be unwilling and unable to go into the rural villages and become part of the village life, study its needs and resources, speak the language of the people, throw aside their devotion to the traditional academic type of training, adapt themselves to the situation, and enter into the spirit of the new program. Training of the traditional type might even be a handicap. "In the new era

¹⁴Ibid.

ormal training is not indispensable. If we wanted to speak facetiously, we might say that normal training is a handicap.

. . . To feel that we can have a school, even though of a primitive type, beneath the trees and under the guidance of a teacher who, even if he ignores the jargon of pedagogy, understands the language of life . . . is to give us confidence in the growth and dignity of our program."¹⁵

So the schools were opened with a sincerity of purpose, with enthusiastic belief in their potential and ultimate achievement, and with a fine dependence on devotion to the service as the sine qua non of success in teaching. The attitude of the initiators of the plan and of the officials carrying on the program at the present time is expressed with characteristic fervor by the director of rural schools in the Secretariat:

We have gone into this task with body and soul, with the twofold purpose of first making life more comfortable and right for the people who live and have their being in this time, and then to make for the generations of the future a world of better weal and greater justice. One day we shall succeed in the making of our rural life in Mexico a life informed in beauty as a garden or a clear sky pulsating with stars.

Speaking of the spirit of the teachers, Moisés Sáenz, who, as subsecretary of the Secretariat of Public Education for several years, is responsible for much of the success of the rural-school program, says:

Filled with the spirit of crusaders, you find us at work on a program of realization. . . . I go the rounds of my rural schools, and in this village and in the next, in hundreds, in fact in most of them, I meet the apostolic teacher. He is marked by devotion, sacrifice, a quenchless enthusiasm, and childlike confidence in the worthiness of the work, a little of the doctrinaire, a kind of soldierly attitude, and that indefinable something, a hidden fountain, a guiding light akin to religion, so evident as to be almost an objective trait, and yet defying the analysis of the most acute observer.

This emphasis on the importance of personal traits in the selection of teachers, particularly on the "spirit of service," should not be interpreted to mean complete disregard of the significance of a knowledge of teaching techniques and the value of promoting and preserving an esprit de corps among the teaching staff. These and the need of systematic means of promoting professional growth were recognized and provided for through two in-service agencies established simultaneously with the schools, namely, the cultural missions and centralized Federal

¹⁵ Ibid.

supervision. These agencies are described in succeeding chapters and were depended upon to compensate in a large measure and in a practical way for the lack of pre-service preparation.

Teachers in the Federal rural schools are employed throughout the year. Salaries, however, are on a per diem basis and vary from 1 to 2 pesos per day. [The value of a peso is approximately 50 cents in United States money; exchange rates vary.] The school term is 10 months in duration, the vacation period 1 month, and attendance at the regular institute conducted by the cultural mission occupies the remaining month of the teacher's year.

Adult Education

In harmony with the large purposes of the rural education program—rehabilitation and incorporation—adult education has a special meaning in Mexico, and is of primary, not secondary, importance in achieving these ends. From the beginning it was recognized that if the school concerned itself with children only, it would not accomplish the desired outcomes, that whatever the school might do for the children an inert community would quickly undermine. This understanding was due in part to recognition of the need of moral support on the part of the community for complete success. But it was also recognized that however large the store of knowledge, habits, and skills acquired during the school period, the adolescent who returned to an unchanged community would quickly take on its life rather than the new one of which he had learned at school. "School would be forgotten and life take on the rhythm of the past."

From the beginning, therefore, the school concerned itself with adults as well as with children. Necessity of a direct attack on the community as a whole—in many instances on adults chiefly—was recognized, aimed toward the improvement of the social and economic conditions of the mass of the people. To achieve this aim night sessions for adults are held in all of the rural schools. The enrollment in these classes sometimes exceeds that in the day school. Instruction is not of the conventional type. Night school is a meeting place for the men and women of the village, "a place where they can talk to each other, can sing together, and where they can hear a little of the outside world, which in this case is our own country, and the story of the social change under way in Mexico."

The school is also a place where people may discuss common interests and local problems, where health campaigns can be initiated, and where committees for carrying on school and community projects can be formed and their work discussed. It is a place where the advantages of modern methods of living are pointed out. The teachers are expected to carry out programs of amusement and recreation for the community, to contribute to the improvement of agriculture and the local industry, and especially to promote appreciation and conservation of the cultural traditions of the people. In short, the teacher carries on an all-round program of social improvement, differing in its aspects and emphases, but with a common purpose.

A rural teacher describes his night school, which doubtless is representative of hundreds of others, as follows:

Many come, both men and women. Sometimes there are as many as 50 in a group. They do not attend with the regularity which one would like to have, as their occupations do not always permit this, but always when they do come it is gladly and with real delight. We teach them what we can, but mainly what they especially want to study. Some study reading, some writing; some ask for instruction in small industries and others in agriculture. Women ask for lessons in home economics, especially with reference to cooking and sewing. We have formed different groups according to their interests and needs. While adults study these practical things they are also learning to sing and to play some instruments, as they have a native love of music and beauty. . . . I am delighted with the social progress which we are making. The streets are swept now; the outsides of the houses have been white-washed; the people dress with more cleanliness, are cleaner; excessive drinking is disappearing somewhat; the fly plague is abated; the people vaccinate against smallpox; the whole village comes to the festivals and concern themselves with the progress of the children in school.

Summary of Impressions

Mexico seems to have started out to build a democracy through education; to incorporate into its national life the rural native population through its rural schools. Two major essentials recognized from the beginning were that the social and economic level of the people must be lifted before academic education could make any headway, and that education was an adult community project as well as one concerned with children. From the beginning the emphasis was placed on changing the environment rather than on eliminating illiteracy, despite the fact that illiteracy was startlingly prevalent when the educational program began. From 65 to 70 per cent of the total population were estimated as illiterate.

From the beginning, responsibility for the program of an individual school was largely in the hands of the community and the teacher. Central authorities maintain and supervise the school; they do not dictate nor prescribe nor formalize its activities. This general attitude is indicated by the types of information sought by Federal inspectors when they visit the schools as reported by the Federal director of rural education. They inquire into (1) the work of the school itself, that is, What is the teacher doing in school hours? (2) The community work, that is, What is the school doing for the community? Has the school a drug store? Has the community pure water? Has the school rendered this or that specific service? (3) How is the community being organized? Is there a committee on hygiene? On domestic art? On general school activities—attendance of children and adults, upkeep of buildings and grounds?

While there has been built up under Federal direction and support a country-wide system of rural schools numbering at the present writing 7,000 and a nation-wide system of supervision and unique systems of in-service and pre-service training for teachers national in scope, yet the program is in none of its phases elaborate or pretentious. It is centralized, but aims definitely toward stimulation of local effort and initiative and toward responsible participation rather than toward standardization of either methods or results. Present policies, the philosophy of education on which the work of the schools is based in so far as a philosophy exists, have grown out of the experiences of the past seven years. The system has "evolved" as a result of experiences believed to be successful in their results. "As far back as 1912," says the Director of Rural Education in the Secretariat of Public Education, "rudimentary schools teaching the three R's were unsatisfactory." It was recognized that community life should be built up economically, socially, recreationally, and the schools were charged with doing it. "We have now arrived at what we believe a theory of rural education should be. The most important part is that the school is a community agency to lead in community life, help spend leisure, and to guide all community activities. The new type of rural school changes the community."

Among outstanding policies and practices which seem significant and suggestive from the point of view of adapting education to the needs of native peoples in general, including those for

whom the people of the United States are responsible, the following are of interest:

The confidence which the whole program places in the teacher—for leadership and for community interest, as well as for the more definite school activities. There is no question of securing teacher participation—the teacher is the school in every essential sense.

The unity of school and community interests and activities and the reality and practicalness of the school projects undertaken. The preparation of materials and building of the schoolhouse are examples.

The building up of a curriculum indigenous to the individual communities, unified through its adaptation to general and common situations.

The freedom from traditional practices and policies resulting in a program based on immediate needs and in other progressive practices indicated.

The simplicity of the school machinery; the freedom from the servitude of the need for elaborate buildings and equipment is but one example.

The emphasis on the practical—economic improvement, for example—without sacrifice of cultural and artistic aims and emphases.

The recognition of adult education as a primary essential to permanence and stability of the program for educating youth.

The emphasis on other than professional qualities in the selection of teachers and the reliance on in-service training to supply the essential professional attitudes and practices, provided the "spirit" was in evidence.

CHAPTER TWO



CULTURAL MISSIONS

SYSTEMATIC in-service training of teachers, the importance of which was recognized when the policy of providing education to rural communities was inaugurated, is now carried on through three significant organizations—the cultural missions, Federal supervision, and special rural normal schools. The first two were established simultaneously with the rural education system; the rural normal schools were a later development. The cultural missions, rendering nation-wide and continuing in-service training for rural teachers, constitute a unique feature of the Mexican school system.

In-service training grew out of the initial necessity of placing in charge of the schools teachers wholly untrained professionally and with little academic preparation. Many more teachers were needed than were available if pre-service training were demanded; it was believed, too, that teachers trained by the traditional methods then in vogue would be unsatisfactory. A new type of teacher was necessary to carry out a new program. "Neither the National University nor normal schools produce ideal teachers with knowledge of native tongues," according to the Federal education department. "They refuse to leave the cities to go to the villages and mountains." It was added also that if choice of rural teachers is made from the surplus of city teachers, those so selected have neither preparation nor

enthusiasm for such work.¹ In the beginning, then, selection of untrained teachers was an approved practice. The importance of compensating for the lack of pre-service preparation was not overlooked. The cultural missions were relied upon to supply, especially to beginners, at least the minimum essentials in knowledge of subject matter, in professional outlook, and in teaching techniques. Supervision was relied upon to carry further the work the missions began. "They (the cultural missions) were the result of the necessity of giving some professional guidance to the teachers in service whom the Federal department had to obtain in the great desire of multiplying the rural schools throughout the nation. In 1923, the first tests were undertaken."² Later, as a result of experience, the functions of the missions were enlarged to include the important community work in which they now engage.

According to present practice, a cultural mission is a traveling group of specialists—an itinerant normal school faculty which confines its work to in-service training of teachers and of communities. Each mission is assigned to a certain territory, which is divided into zones or regions, in each of which a certain base or center is selected in which the institute—a series of intensive short courses—is held. In this "concentration center" the teachers of the zone or region gather, bringing with them certain prescribed equipment—their own cup and plate, for example. They lodge in the community and eat in a common dining room, the mess hall, organized for the purpose by the mission staff. An institute lasts 30 days; the daily schedule, an intensive one, begins at 6 a. m. and ends at 6 p. m. Since the Federal rural teachers are employed throughout the year, attendance at the institute is a part of the regular annual schedule.

The staff of a traveling mission consists of "picked experts," usually one in agriculture and allied subjects; one in the industries (pottery, weaving, soap making, tanning, etc.); one in popular arts (music, drawing, drama); one in physical education, including recreation, sports, and games; one or more nurses; and a community or social worker. The last named is considered a "key" person in the group, since the rural school is the center of the social and economic life of the community. Teaching of domestic science, the care and feeding of children, cloth making, and general home-making activities are in charge of the community-organization specialist.

¹ Las Misiones Culturales en 1927. México, La Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1928.
² Ibid., Ramírez, p. 4.

Qualifications of the mission-staff members are not standardized. The staff is made up of men and women with general and professional training superior to that of the teachers they instruct, often, but not necessarily, with normal school or college training. Sometimes they are tradesmen of successful experience and ability. Like the teachers, they are selected in part because of personal and leadership qualities of a high order. Spirit, enthusiasm, and devotion to and belief in the worthiness of educational work as a national service are believed to be of major importance in the selection of the mission as of the teaching staff. More and more they are charged with the function of inspiring the people of the respective communities in which they work, as well as the teachers, with higher ideals, economic and social.

The staff is selected by the Federal officials. There is a directorship or bureau of cultural missions in the Secretariat of Public Education, in charge of the mission activities. A chief is in charge of each mission, who is responsible for its organization. The Federal, State, and local directors of education are expected to attend the institutes in their respective districts, to cooperate in their success "materially and morally," and to continue in their respective States and districts projects and policies initiated during the institute.

In 1927, a 6-weeks' course for members of mission staffs was offered, directed by the Federal Secretariat.

The chiefs of missions studied principles of education—city, urban, rural; school organization and administration; educational psychology; teaching methods; hygiene and sanitation; Mexican sociology and rural economics; and children's literature.

The social workers studied domestic science, feeding and care of children, cloth making; hygiene and sanitation, and Mexican sociology and rural economics—social organization of the rural community.

The teachers of physical education took games and sports, calisthenics, rhythmic exercises and aesthetics, physiology and hygiene, and sports organizations.

The teachers of agriculture took agricultural problems, rural credit, small rural industries, and Mexican sociology and rural economics.

The teachers of small industries took theory and practice in soap making, tanning, preserving fruits and vegetables, school industries, and dairying.

In each zone of the territory to which a mission is assigned, one institute is held, as a rule, each year. The zones or regions are approximately 100 miles square, varying, of course, according to population density, topography, etc. Each mission conducts 10 institutes during the year. In 1931 there were 12 traveling and 2 permanent missions covering the country at large. The number is not yet adequate, and certain regions are served by institutes only once in two years. This situation is to be remedied when funds are available.

The Federal Secretariat keeps in close touch with the work of the missions and with the conduct of the institutes. Instructions are issued as to procedures from time to time. Space is not available for details. Therefore, as an example of the type of these instructions, the following outline of work to be covered by four types of instructors at an institute is submitted:

Instructions for social workers:

I. For work with the teachers—

- (a) The development of a simple course of hygiene, including first aid and prevention of the common diseases.
- (b) Development of a course in dietetics, embracing the basis of balanced feeding, recipes, and the preparation of a certain number of menus.
- (c) Development of a simple course of child care.
- (d) Development of a simple and practical course of sewing and women's work.
- (e) Series of lessons to teach teachers how to work within the community, instructing them in social organization, how to obtain collective profits, demonstrations in home improvement, etc.

II. For work in the community—

- (a) Talks on hygiene, prevention of disease, first aid, vaccination, etc.
- (b) Domestic science, including cooking and women's work.
- (c) Feeding and care of children.
- (d) Home visiting and suggestions for home betterment.
- (e) Social meetings and entertainments.
- (f) Organization of the neighborhood into associations or clubs of domestic science, entertainment, or recreation.

III. For work with the children of the schools near the institute—

- (a) Vaccination.
- (b) Classes in hygiene and domestic science to demonstrate improved methods.

Instructions to the teachers of small industries:

I. For work with the teachers and community—

- (a) Classes in tanning and preservation of hides, preservation of fruits and vegetables, soap making, school industries, and something of dairying.
- (b) In the school near the institute they hold industrial classes serving as demonstration classes.
- (c) Organize courses for small industries at different hours for the communities. Help neighbors with their problems.

Instructions to the teachers of agriculture:

Work must be of a practical nature, including breeding of animals, bee raising, provide a vegetable garden, a flower garden, and if possible, an orchard. You will be attended by the teachers of the institute as well as the students, particularly when trying to use them in demonstration classes for teachers in the community. You must leave something in the community, i. e., a garden and instruction; all instructions and suggestions must be practical, such as cooperative production, etc.

Instructions to teachers of physical education:

I. For work with the teachers—

- (a) Games and sports.
- (b) Classes in games, gymnasium, and sports to introduce them into the schools.
- (c) Organization of athletic contests.

II. For work with children—

- (a) Gymnasium classes, games, and sports with educational aims.
- (b) Demonstration classes for teachers.

III. For work with the neighborhood—

- (a) With men.

When mission leaves there must be left behind an athletic association and a field for games and sports.

Catherine Vesta Sturgis, social worker in the permanent mission at Actopan, who has worked with the cultural missions, traveling and permanent, practically from the initiation of the rural-school program, explains the purposes of the cultural missions as follows:

First, as to the community, the people are disintegrated due to racial and language differences, and the mission aims to help the school to form communities with an organic life and to help the people to build a whole life. In the past the church has been the one unifying cultural influence, and such cultural and psychological unity as there is to lay

hold of is this inheritance. The missions work with the adults and the community as a whole, especially in directing popular arts, music, and drama. They help the community to feel the school as a cultural social influence and to feel the teacher as a leader in many aspects of their life.

For the teachers the mission integrates a philosophy of rural education which concerns itself with the control of environment (economic), with health and child welfare, with home life and domestic relationships, and with recreation, spiritual and physical. They train teachers in the essentials of the school program, bring them a sense of being a part in a strong, unified program, and take back to the central base their findings of original resources among the diverse peoples and their discoveries of the achievements of teachers, all of which are worked into a program constantly in the making.*

The selection of a central place in which to hold an institute is made with considerable care. It must be a small community—not more than two or three thousand in population. There must be lodging available for the teachers; it must be accessible; there must be a Federal school for demonstration purposes. Teachers must assemble two or three days before the opening day. A circulating library will be installed by the mission, and in each institute there must be physical education equipment, carpentry, domestic science, and agricultural equipment. Practice differs as to source of these, but they must be available.

In relation to the selection of the concentration centers, the Federal Secretariat explains:

Should we wish to deal with problems in the abstract and give general instruction, it would be better to hold the meetings in the cities or centers of greater population, making the teachers come to the institute instead of the institute to the teachers. However, this has not been the purpose. We wish the institute to go to the teachers and to develop under the same conditions under which the rural teacher has to work, as well as to study in the location itself the problems that may present themselves. Based on this theory, there is no reason to talk about the ideal rural condition nor abstract scientific principles. They have there a rural school with a house, equipment, and children just as they are, and they will have to study with the teachers the way to make this a more noble and more efficient educational agency. For this reason the school becomes the laboratory of the institute.

Beginning with one mission group in 1923, development has taken place in the number of such groups, in scope of service, and in methods of work. An early discovery concerned the possibilities of reciprocal service between the mission and the communities and regions in which it works. When the first

* Not a direct quotation, but the substance of excerpts from an address made before the Sixth Seminar in Mexico.

mission was organized with teachers as a nucleus, the community became interested and enrolled especially in agricultural, industrial, and home-making classes. The work was made practical from the community's standpoint and proved immediately beneficial. Consequently, mission and community relations grew in importance, and it became an accepted function of the mission to inspire communities with confidence in the Federal education program; to help raise their social level through direct instruction in agriculture, industry, and home and family life; to explore and use their cultural resources as teachers unassisted could not; and to bring back their findings concerning such resources to the central base to be worked into the school program year by year for its greater enrichment.

The present policy of the Federal Government is to consider the village and the school as laboratories of the institute, directing their teaching efforts toward local problems by way of demonstrating universal or prevailing ones. It is also expected that each institute leave a permanent contribution to the community in which it is held—a garden, a playground, or recreation center, an open-air theater, improved sanitation, or what not. In pursuance of the purpose of promoting community progress, the staff is expected to arrive in the concentration center early enough to make a preliminary survey of the section, to establish contacts with the school and the community, and in all ways prepare to render during the institute session definite community service.

When the month's work of the cultural mission and its local group of teachers ends, the closing day is a fiesta occasion for the immediate community in which the institute is held and for the surrounding region whose schools are represented in the attendance. The opportunity to participate in and observe the closing day of a teachers' institute conducted by the mission at Tula was a revelation to the author in the amount and spirit of community interest, and especially in the fact that participation extended well beyond the immediate community, being truly representative of the region at large. Tula is an ancient city, once a center of pre-Hispanic civilization and obviously a city of dignity and importance during and since the Spanish régime. Arriving there on the morning of the closing day, one felt the festive and hospitable atmosphere. Buildings were decorated with flags; streets were filled with horses and cattle on their way to the exhibits, and with men, women, and children, riding and on foot; food was cooking and on sale along the streets and in

the market square—a typical Mexican fiesta spirit everywhere in evidence.

A street fair surrounded the market square, exhibiting products of the neighboring *haciendas* and *ejidos*, horses, cattle, chickens, vegetables, and fruits attractively, even amazingly, arrayed, many of the animals carrying the prize ribbons recently won. Horses and cattle were decorated with ribbons and flowers, some in ancient Aztec patterns preserved and used continuously through the centuries and of traditional or religious significance to the descendants of the early civilizations.

The institute itself had prepared an extensive exhibit of its work, forecasting the activities which during the coming school year would be featured by the teachers in attendance at their respective schools. The institute exhibit was made up of products of the school gardens, canned fruits and vegetables, all types of handicrafts, including furniture, baskets, pottery, weaving, and the like, industries which the next year the teachers would be promoting in their school communities.

In the morning there were games, athletic stunts, native dances in which teachers and community participated and which were given in the village stadium, again forecasting and demonstrating the activities which teachers would be expected to promote through their schools in the local communities to which they would later be assigned or from which they came. In the afternoon the guests were entertained by a performance at the theater, consisting chiefly of short 1-act plays, music, native dances, and the like.

The guests apparently represented the whole countryside, including as well prominent officials, Federal and State. Among the latter were the Governor, the Federal Senator from the State in which the city is located, the Subsecretary from the Secretariat of Education, the Federal Director of Rural Education, and others of similar rank. At noon an elaborate course dinner tendered these officials and other guests by the community was served in the community house, which during the institute had been occupied by the mission staff and some of the teachers.

The festivities ended only with the day. The teachers' institute had then become an occasion in the purpose, spirit, and work of which the whole region had participated. The successful cultivation of this unity of school and community spirit, interests, and activities is a unique feature of the work of the cultural missions as it impresses a visitor from abroad.

The work in which this particular mission had been engaged preceding the closing day celebration with the teachers and the schools of the region, and reasonably typical of that carried on by the 13 other similar mission groups, is described as follows by the Federal Director of Rural Education:

In Tula, Hidalgo, a short distance away from Mexico City, a traveling mission is at present at work. It began its work there on the 5th of July and will finish on the 3d of August. It is constituted of a chief of mission, a general community worker, an agronomist, an expert in rural petty industries, an instructor in physical education, another in instrumental and vocal music, and another in arts and crafts. During the next four weeks it will conduct there a teachers' institute which will render service in that whole region. During the four weeks the teachers gathered there will work intensely for their own improvement, both in their general culture and in their vocation; they will study with the members of the mission the pressing problems of social and educational nature which they have encountered in their communities; they will receive inspiration for giving more satisfactory content to their programs; they will receive advice and help for vitalizing their methods of instruction; they will learn through demonstration work, which the members of the mission will carry out in the town of Tula itself, how to bring together the minds of all the inhabitants in a single consciousness which feels the aspiration for a better way of living in the home and in the community; and they will learn also through practical demonstration how to bring it about that little communities in which they work better themselves in all ways. The teachers who are gathered there will study, then, new ideas in education, better methods of school organization and of instruction, and will learn to convert their schools into centers which render social service; they will increase their hoard of culture; they will be trained in petty trades and industries of the rural environment; they will practice physical exercises, games, and sports; they will strengthen their artistic resources and give serious thought to the importance of stimulating our regional arts and crafts. Together with this they acquire fundamental and effective ideas of social organization and feeling for handling their communities, to the end of working for their own development. The traveling mission which is in Tula at present is doing this in an admirable way. I know very well its chief, Isadro Castillo, and the members of the mission, and I vouchsafe to you the excellence of their work. You can go to visit them, so that you can see with your own eyes what they are doing there for the cultural and vocational betterment of our teachers in service, an urgently necessary thing which if it had not been done we would have made of our promising rural teachers creatures of routine without conscience, without ideals, without spirit.

Besides the traveling missions, there are two permanent missions, one located at Actopan, in the State of Hidalgo, a few

¹Sefior Don Rafael Ramirez, in an address delivered before the Fifth Seminar in Mexico.

hours by automobile from Mexico City, and the other at Paracho, in the State of Michoacan. These are experimental groups working with the teachers, schools, and particularly with the adult population, gathering basic information, projecting activities designed to improve the social, sanitary, and economic conditions of the communities in the regions in which they work. Eventually these missions, with two commissions also carrying on studies and experiments concerned with the characteristics and environment of the different racial groups which make up the Indian population, will discover facts on which— we will postulate for the future of our rural education; meanwhile we will go on working with the wholesome practical philosophy which experience has taught us is good.

The mission at Actopan has completed three years of constant and resultful effort. This mission is comprised of technical entities in agriculture, rural construction and industries, small trades, and arts and crafts, and the work of these entities is rounded out by that of a physician and practical nurse, an obstetrical nurse, a recreational director, a music instructor, a household arts and home craft worker, and a general community worker who is the key person in the organization of the group. The members of this mission go from village to village in the countryside inspiring in the people the conception of higher ways of living. The region of Actopan is inhabited by the Otomi race, one of the poorest, most uneducated, and most backward, and at the same time one which we have most neglected until now, in spite of the fact that it has latent capacities for incalculable development. The mission has brought about a social transformation which reaches deep. The people now live in a better way in a social and domestic sense and are beginning to avail themselves in a more intelligent way of the slender resources of the soil. They are losing little by the tragic appearance which they have had for generations, and in their faces one reads a greater contentment with life. This miracle is due to these modern missionaries of Franciscan and Benedictine spirit which the department of education has sent to this region for its redemption in this life if not in another.⁶

Supplementing the experimental work of the two permanent missions are two commissions, one the commission of Indian studies, in charge of Don Moisés Sáenz, whose function is to study "the fundamental characteristics of different racial groups, their life and their customs, their language, their temperament, their habits, and so on, and the commission of rural life studies. The latter is at present giving its attention to the Otomi race, which occupies much territory in the country and is considered socially backward." It is among these people, too, that the cultural mission in Actopan works.

⁶ Ibid.

From the ultimate efforts of these research and experimental organizations, the permanent missions and the two commissions referred to, it is expected that a new and more complete philosophy of rural education, as well as suggestions for improved and detailed techniques, will be evolved. These expectations are expressed officially as follows:

Until the present time we have all been working and are keeping on working in the field of rural education in this country; we have done so by intuition and inspiration. We have been "playing by ear," as our popular musicians so expressively say. If you have been able to perceive, mingled in this account, something of a philosophy of rural education, you may be sure that it has formed itself in the measure that the schools themselves have risen to being. It is an "a posteriori" philosophy and not a philosophy upon which we have deliberately based our system of rural education. In spite of regarding this philosophy as good, we now wish to shape the future development of our schools in the rural environment upon genuinely scientific bases. To this end there has been at work this year a commission of Indian studies, which has just been taken in charge by the educator Don Moisés Sáenz, who will carefully study the fundamental characteristics of the different racial groups, their life and their customs, their language, their temperament, their habits.*

The cultural missions so briefly described in the foregoing pages really perform strategic functions, upon which the success or failure of many of the basic purposes of the Federal rural-school system depends. Their primary function is that of training teachers in service, and together—12 traveling and 2 permanent missions—they constitute a nation-wide in-service training agency which brings to every rural teacher annually, in or near his own local community, high-grade professional training, itself of a practical nature, in the most practical situations, selected as they are with the avowed purpose of typifying those in which the teacher works. This training, quite unlike much in-service training in the United States, offers not theory alone but theory accompanied by definite and practical observation and practice opportunities. In addition the missions are charged with promoting unity of school and community interests and activities; they are in part responsible for the creation and perpetuation of an esprit de corps among widely scattered yet centrally responsible teachers and communities; for interpreting the Federal education program to the communities and to the teachers, and in turn interpreting these two

*Ibid.

groups to each other and to the Federal Secretariat. In cooperation with other agencies the missions, especially the permanent ones, will, it is to be expected, increasingly assume large responsibilities for much experimentation and for future educational policies evolved therefrom, especially for gathering and interpreting basic material for continuously formulating and enriching the content of the curriculum.

CHAPTER THREE



NORMAL SCHOOLS

PREPARATION of teachers for service in the Federal schools in Mexico is carried on by the Federal Government under the direction and as one of the functions of the Department of Primary and Normal Instruction, a subdivision of the Federal Secretariat. The institutions maintained for this purpose are the Higher Normal School, which is a part of the National University, the National Normal School in the Federal District, and 17 rural normal schools distributed among the several States. The rural normal schools are the newest of the teacher education institutions.

Program for the Rural Normal Schools

When the national program for rural education was launched, special normal schools for the purpose of preparing teachers for the new rural schools were not among its provisions, although it was known at the time that few teachers trained for any type of school were available. Since the program was to be a departure from traditional objectives and practices in education, and since the avowed purpose was that it should be indigenous to the situation in a very real sense, that it should come from the bottom up rather than be imposed from above, a new type of teacher, rather than one trained according to the traditional practices, was believed necessary. The schools were to be frankly experimental, so far as procedures carried on by them were concerned—these were to be accepted and considered permanent only as experience proved their worth. There were few precedents to follow in organizing the work of the new schools, still fewer in courses suitable to prepare teachers for them. There was confidence in the program and its objectives. Individuals of ability were available, in sympathy with the program, who could work out details experimentally. Under all these conditions it was decided to proceed with the schools under the direction of persons selected on the bases indicated, and develop details of organization and curricula in the light of successful experience, postponing the establishment of pre-service training until the experiment was on a surer footing. This attitude is expressed in an address delivered by the Director of Rural Education of the Federal Secretariat as follows: "When we knew what we wanted our teachers to do we organized normal schools." Their purpose is to offer training (1) for teaching children, (2) for teaching adults in health and better living, and (3) in organizing communities for social and economic betterment."

So it appears, from the point of view of the situation in Mexico and the program designed to meet it, a logical procedure that normal schools for training rural teachers should be established after the program was well under way in the schools. When school officials had carried the experiment far enough to have determined with considerable definiteness what they considered its strengths and its weaknesses—when, in other words, they "knew what they wanted," normal schools were set up.

This threefold purpose of rural-teacher preparation, now accepted and carried out in the normal schools, was, as indicated

in the statement of the Director of Rural Education, arrived at as a result of experience; it is based on successful practice in the rural schools extending over a period of years of experimentation. Equal emphasis is placed on the three functions of the schools, namely, instruction of children, instruction of adults, and the social and economic improvement of the communities. The three functions proceed simultaneously. Teachers must be prepared to perform all of them. Experience gained in the rural schools influences practices followed in normal schools in teaching methods, accepted classroom and community projects, curriculum content, as well as the general objectives mentioned.

The function of the rural normal schools is also officially designated as "the preparation, by means of regular courses, of teachers for the small communities and native centers."¹ The first one was established in 1922; after that only two additional ones were opened, one in 1923 and one in 1925, until 1926, when four new schools were established. From 1927 to 1931, 10 such schools were opened; in all, 17 are now in operation. They are distributed, as far as possible, according to needs throughout the Republic.

Faculty and Students

In the selection of the faculties for the rural normal schools and in the admission and provision for living expenses of students—the prospective teachers of the rural schools—as in other practical matters, the Federal officials responsible keep definitely in mind the community building as well as the instructional objectives of the schools.

The staff members of the several normal schools are selected by the central education officials and supervised and directed by them. In their selection certain personality qualities similar to those sought in teachers, such as ability to lead in practical activities for community betterment, confidence in the national education program, and consecration to the service, receive consideration, as well as professional and academic attainments. The faculty of each normal school includes instructors in shopwork and small industries, in home economics, in health, recreation, and physical education, as well as in the academic subjects. Most of the schools are relatively small as to enroll-

¹ *Las Misiones Culturales en 1927: Las Escuelas Normales Rurales.* Publication of the Secretaría de Educación Pública. Mexico, D. F., 1928.

ment, several having around 50 students in the normal school proper. The staffs number four to nine—occasionally a few more.

In order to insure that students are recruited from the poorer classes of the people and from regions and villages which should be reached by the education program, scholarships covering most of the expense of attending school are provided by the Federal Government to a high percentage of the students. Other arrangements are made adapted to the needs of such students, such as providing cultural environment, recreational opportunities, economical living, desirable home atmosphere and training, as well as the usual opportunities for academic and professional growth.

The plans for the conduct and maintenance of the rural normal schools outlined by the Federal education officials in charge specify that the home life of the schools be such as to give an "atmosphere of kindness and an environment of real domestic life." Life is to "unfold in the natural way" as it would in a home. Rigid and formal regulations are to be avoided and "students shall take an active part in the domestic work, to the end that they may be firmly convinced that the association and mutual help offered by the institution is such as that of a family." Students who, after two months as permanent students, do not give to the teachers "application, sympathy, and an inclination to learn" are dropped from the school.

Among entrance requirements set up by the Federal Government, the following are of interest:²

The students of the rural normal schools shall be of two kinds—boarding and day students. In both cases the recruiting of the same shall be from the various communities included in the territory served by the institution, choosing by preference from among the poorer class when any favor is shown in giving scholarships. The basis of selection for both kinds of students shall be as follows:

1. They must have satisfactorily completed at least the elementary primary school confirmed by a certificate or take an examination for admission to the first semester, and a superior primary education for admission to the second.
2. Young men must be more than 15 and young women more than 14 years of age.
3. They must feel that teaching is their vocation.

² Ibid., p. 225.

4. They must have good health and no physical defects that will incapacitate them for leadership.
5. They must be of good character.

Curricula Offered

The curriculum followed in the rural normal schools is outlined rather generally by the Department of Primary and Normal Instruction with the cooperation of the Department of Rural Schools. It is organized to allow considerable freedom in interpretation and adaptation by the faculties of individual schools. It aims to achieve the objectives indicated above by providing courses which are designed to contribute to general education, to give special preparation in teaching methods, to teach scientific procedures in crop raising and animal husbandry, and to give instruction and practice in the common small trades and rural industries as well as in community organization and improvement. Courses in "domestic economics and arts" are offered young women as a means of improving community and home life.

Two and three year courses are offered in each of the rural normal schools, the length of the course followed being dependent on the kind and amount of education the student has when he enters the normal school. The entrance requirement set up—completion of the elementary school—is not rigidly enforced when students otherwise promising as prospective teachers apply for admission.

The regular course is two years in duration; each school year is made up of two semesters of five months each. This course leads to a diploma as rural teacher from the Federal Secretariat of Public Education on its successful completion.

The courses for the four semesters as prescribed by the Secretariat are as follows:¹

First semester.—(1) The national language, 6 periods of 45 minutes per week; (2) arithmetic and geometry, 5 periods of 45 minutes per week; (3) social science (geography, history, and civics), 6 periods of 45 minutes per week; (4) nature study, 3 periods of 45 minutes per week; (5) singing and physical education (alternating), 6 periods of 30 minutes per week; (6) writing and drawing, 6 periods of 30 minutes per week; (7) domestic economics, comprising cooking and sewing (alternating), 4 periods of 45 minutes per week; (8) agricultural work,

¹Ibid., pp. 223-24.

6 periods of 60 minutes per week; (9) shop and rural industries, 6 periods of 60 minutes per week.

This first semester has for its object giving students an academic preparation equivalent to superior primary education; in consequence it is necessary to accentuate the teaching of the general subjects, particularly the national language and arithmetic and geometry.

Second semester.—(1) National language, 5 periods of 45 minutes per week; (2) arithmetic and geometry, 5 periods of 45 minutes per week; (3) nature study, 5 periods of 45 minutes per week; (4) social science (geography, history, and civics), 5 periods of 45 minutes per week; (5) singing and physical education, 6 periods of 30 minutes per week; (6) anatomy, physiology, and hygiene, 4 periods of 45 minutes per week; (7) writing and drawing, 4 periods of 30 minutes per week; (8) domestic economics, comprising cooking and sewing (for young women), 4 periods of 45 minutes per week; (9) agricultural work, 6 periods of 75 minutes per week; (10) shopwork and rural industries, 6 periods of 75 minutes per week.

Third semester.—(1) National language, 3 periods of 45 minutes per week; (2) arithmetic and geometry, 3 periods of 45 minutes per week; (3) social science (geography, history, and civics), 3 periods of 45 minutes per week; (4) singing and physical education, 6 periods of 30 minutes per week; (5) study of rural life, 3 periods of 30 minutes per week; (6) child study and principles of education, 3 periods of 45 minutes per week; (7) domestic economics (for young women), 3 periods of 45 minutes per week; (8) agricultural work, 6 periods of 90 minutes per week; (9) shop and rural industries, 6 periods of 90 minutes per week; (10) technique for teaching reading and writing, 2 periods of 45 minutes per week; (11) observation in the primary rural school annex (by turns).

Fourth semester.—(1) National language, 3 periods of 45 minutes per week; (2) arithmetic and geometry, 3 periods of 45 minutes per week; (3) social organization for the improvement of communities, 3 periods of 45 minutes per week; (4) organization and administration of rural schools, 3 periods of 45 minutes per week; (5) technique of teaching, 3 periods of 45 minutes per week; (6) domestic economics (for young women), 2 periods of 45 minutes per week; (7) singing and physical education, 6 periods of 30 minutes per week; (8) agricultural work, 6 periods of 90 minutes per week; (9) shop and rural industries, 6 periods of 90 minutes per week; (10) practice in rural school annex (by turns).

NOTE.—The directors of the schools, by agreement with the Federal Director of Education, can modify these class periods according to the needs and conditions of the school, on condition that the program employ an equivalent period of time.

Among the purposes of the normal schools as stated by the Federal Secretariat of Public Education ⁴ is "the incorporation of the small communities of the same region into the general progress of the country by means of extension work carried on

⁴ Ibid.

by these institutions." To this end the normal schools supervise community activities and Federal schools in the region immediately surrounding them, assisting the schools in their program. The normal schools also initiate independent projects.

It is also required by the Federal Secretariat that evening and night, Saturday and Sunday courses in "general science, in agriculture, in small industries, in home economics, be established for the adults of the surrounding community or communities. In these the students of the advanced grades, as well as the normal school faculty, are to offer instruction."

In all the activities of the normal schools and in the furtherance of the objectives of the teacher-preparing program, the community in which the normal school is located and the local Federal school are used as laboratory facilities by the faculty and students. The local Federal school is known as the annex. No normal school is established unless the community maintains such a school. The local school is an observation, demonstration teaching, and practice center. Usually it is taught by the students of the normal school under the supervision of the faculty members.

In this school and community center the prospective teacher sees in operation and familiarizes himself through participation with the activities, school and community, which he will be expected to carry out in his future teaching assignment. "In the little towns around about the institutions they (the teacher students) do practice work in the dignification of domestic life, in the elevation of habitual occupations, the betterment of community health, in improved control of the natural resources of the environment, and in the enrichment of recreational life. With these extension activities of the rural normal schools the little country towns are aroused to new stirrings of aspiration and hope of redemption, and they set about to work with their own hands for their own betterment." This kind of training assures, in the opinion of Federal officials, that the young people will go out from the normal schools as "well-rounded community directors" with practical as well as theoretical training in the promotion of the program of "incorporation"—the ultimate aim of the socialized school as it is conceived in Mexico.

The rural normal schools function also in the in-service training of teachers, especially of those in the vicinity of the institution. They organize and conduct teachers' institutes from

time to time, especially during vacation periods. These institutes are usually from 10 days to 2 weeks in duration. Courses are arranged to contribute to the improvement of the cultural and vocational qualifications of teachers in service and are considered stimulating and helpful in spite of their short duration.

Building and Equipment

In housing arrangements, the needs of the normal schools, like those of the primary and secondary schools of Mexico, are simple and are usually satisfied with relatively little expense to the communities or to the Federal Government. Several are housed in abandoned and in some cases partially ruined convents. At least one is a rebuilt abandoned hacienda. Land in sufficient quantity to provide a school farm is sometimes donated by the community in which the school is located, or otherwise made available either without expense or with a minimum of expense to the Government.

When an abandoned building surrounded by fields in need of reconditioning is acquired as a site for a normal school, the instructors and students, with the cooperation of the community, undertake the responsibility—often also perform the necessary labor—of reconstruction and rehabilitation. Machinery and tools furnished are usually simple and inadequate. Sometimes they are acquired wholly or in part through the efforts of the school. Yet the combined efforts of the groups indicated result in reasonably convenient, even beautiful, schools.

Generally only the minimum of equipment is furnished, whether for industrial or academic work. This, too, is acquired as time goes on in part through the efforts of the school. All the necessary household tasks of the living quarters, as well as those concerned with the upkeep and efficient conduct of the school, are performed by the students as a matter of course.

The Federal Government has established certain requirements concerning the site and building which are of interest. As outlined in *Las Misiones Culturales en 1927*^{*} they are:

To properly fulfill their object, the normal schools will be installed on grounds communicating easily with centers of population of some importance. Moreover, there shall be taken into account, for their foundation, the following requisites:

1. As the normal schools will be obliged to have boarding students, the building must be sufficiently ample to allow conveniently for the

^{*}*Ibid.* Publication of La Secretaría de Educación Pública. México, 1928.

following services: Classes, dormitories, baths, dining room, kitchen, toilet, etc.

2. The school must have cultivated land of good quality, sufficient in extent for work in horticulture, vegetable gardening, fruits, and extensive general crops. The extent of the improved grounds must not be less than 6 hectares, and if the rainfall of the region so requires, the necessity for irrigation must be taken account of.

3. The property must be of sufficient extent to establish the following annexes to the institution: Workshops for offices and small rural industries and provision for the rearing of domestic animals.

4. It will be indispensable also that the property be adequate for the functioning of a primary rural-school annex for the professional practice of the normal students.

The normal school recently established at Tamaulipas supplies a good example of the way in which partially ruined buildings and farm sites are adapted to the new purpose of educating rural teachers. It illustrates also the spirit of service and the belief in the worthiness of the program for educating the rural population which so often characterizes the faculty and students of the rural normal schools. The story is told by the Federal Director of Rural Education.

The revolution passed through there (Tamaulipas) and swept clean all that human endeavor had constructed. Everything was left bare and desolate. The only thing remaining was a big, old, ruined house in an utter state of abandonment. It had been the seat of a rich and powerful hacienda. Its lands had been parceled out to dwellers in the ranch settlement who survived the storm of the revolution. A little over a year and a half ago the Department of Education sent there a group of chosen teachers with the vision, the enthusiastic will to do, the temperament and spirit of missionaries. These teachers bore the commission to make use of the ruined structures and crop lands for the establishment of a rural normal school. They set their hand to the task of reconstructing the building and making it appropriate for domestic and scholastic life. They conditioned the crop fields, installed departments for the various rural industries of the region and for stock, domestic, and work animals. The moment they were on the ground they opened school. Now, after a year and a half, the school is owner of 26 hectares of crop land, all of it irrigated. It has harvested abundant crops of corn, sugarcane, and vegetables. It has orchards of walnut, avocado, and other kinds of fruit trees. The pupils, to the number of 50, are organized in the form of a cooperative which includes various activities, making fiber products; raising chickens; keeping cows, goats, pigs; crop farming; running a bakery and barber shop. The school owns chickens, ducks, guinea hens, horses, 17 head of cattle, a herd of goats, and 32 hogs, some of which are Poland China. All these animals were secured by the cooperative society of the school.

At present everything which is produced or made in the school is utilized and consumed in it, and with the increment it is hoped it will be necessary later to look for an outlet for the products. Indeed, it is hoped by the director of the school that it will eventually become self-sustaining.

Of the students of this normal school—59 in number—50 are provided with scholarships of 60 centavos a day each by the Federal Department of Education, 3 are supported by the school, and 6 pay for their schooling. Sixteen were graduated from the school the current year. Of these the director of the normal school states: "I can assure you that each one of these teachers is shaped in the wood from the timber of which social leaders are made, and that by the same token you can count on genuine community directors and not only teachers prepared for work with school-age children."

The activities of the faculty and students in rebuilding the abandoned hacienda into an acceptable plant for a normal school at Tamaulipas, in fertilizing and planting the fields surrounding it to furnish food for the resident students, as well as a laboratory for training teachers in methods of crop production, which they will later use in their school and community work, offer but one example of a procedure commonly followed in Mexico. It is a plan which is doubtless responsible in part for the rapid progress in establishing educational institutions despite the lack of ample financial resources.

During the Spanish-colonial period numerous convents and churches, many of them representative of the highest attainments in architecture, sculpture, and painting of the cultured countries of Europe of that period, were built. These convents often, perhaps generally, were seats of wealth and culture during the colonial period. Time and many revolutions have taken their toll of these historic landmarks; but since they were built for the ages, their substantial walls still stand. Several of these near-ruins, suitably located for normal schools, are being, or have been, transformed into reasonably appropriate and convenient schools.

Through such restoration, as a result of the work of education officials and students, not only are buildings made available for normal schools with little expense to the Federal Government, but in some instances at least works of art in architecture, sculpture, and paintings well worth preservation are preserved. The restoration of a Dominican convent built in 1542 in a lovely old Aztec grove at Oaxtepec is an example. The walls and ceiling of this old building were originally decorated in the manner of the Spanish-colonial period. Time and decay had obscured the paintings, which recent steps in the

restoration process have revealed. The paintings are now being preserved or appreciatively restored where necessary.

The transformation of abandoned buildings of various kinds—churches, convents, haciendas, and even less pretentious residences, into day and residence schools, some of them with such modern accessories as swimming pools, basketball courts, and the like—most of the work performed without cost and by teachers, students, and community leaders—is not the least interesting of the developments in the Mexican school program. Mexican schools, day schools as well as normal schools, are a lesson in what enthusiasm and determination can accomplish without money. Buildings and equipment are usually primitive and inadequate, yet the spirit of the work suffers little from such inadequacies—perhaps it is stronger because of them.

At present there are not enough rural normal schools to furnish teachers for more than a small percentage of the rural schools, which have recently been increasing in number at the rate of nearly 1,000 a year. It is the present purpose to increase the number of these schools to at least one in each State and Territory, as well as to improve and enlarge the facilities of those now established to accommodate a larger number of students. "It is our present longing to make possible that number. The day will come when we will ask for more" (normal schools).

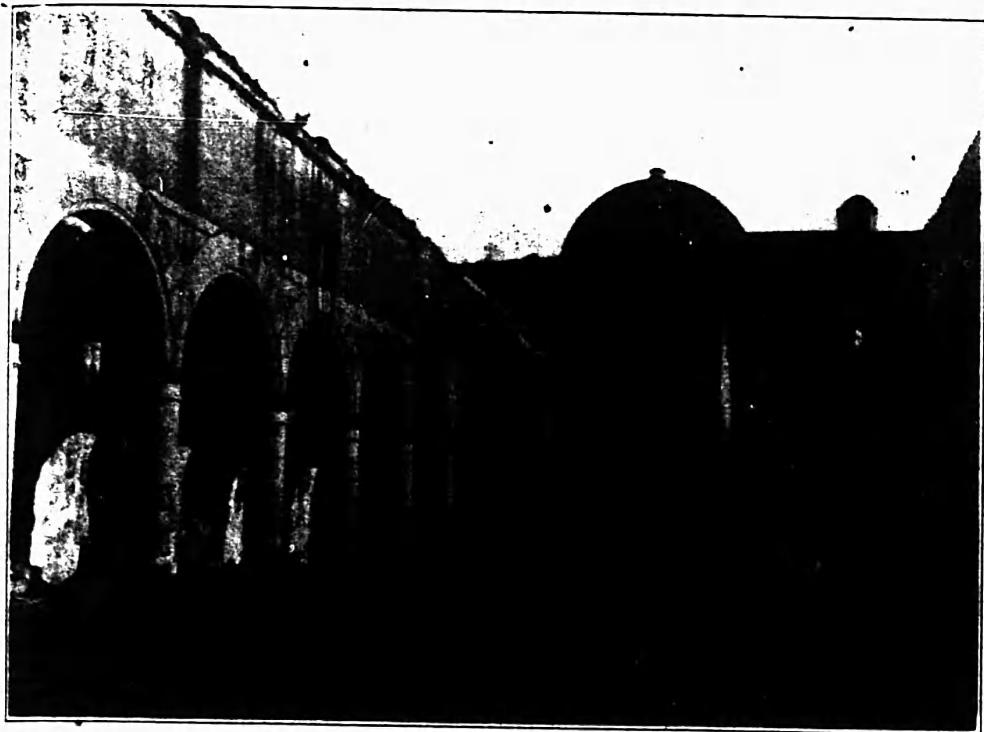
CHAPTER FOUR



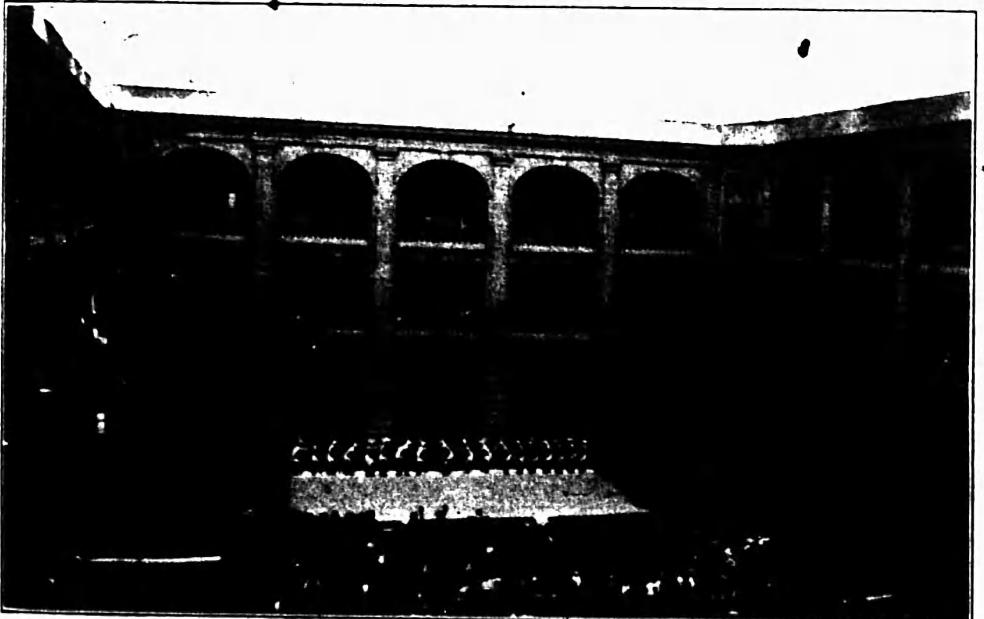
SECRETARÍA DE EDUCACIÓN PÚBLICA

IN THE preceding discussion reference has been made to the Federal rural schools and to their establishment, direction, and supervision by Federal education authorities. All Federal activities concerned with education in Mexico, including those concerned with rural education, are centralized in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, a central organization corresponding to a department in our Government. The chief officer of any Secretaría is a member of the President's Cabinet, just as the heads of departments in the Government of the United States are members of the President's Cabinet. The Secretary of Education is appointed by the President of the Republic.

Up to 1921 education in Mexico was largely a State function. Each of the 28 States of the United States of Mexico maintained its own system. The Federal Government organized and maintained schools in the Federal District (corresponding somewhat to our own District of Columbia) and in the three Territories. During the Presidency of Obregón the national constitution was amended and the Federal Government given the right to establish, organize, and maintain schools throughout the Republic.



A RUINED CONVENT OF SPANISH COLONIAL DAYS NOW BEING CONVERTED INTO
A RURAL NORMAL SCHOOL



PRESENTATION OF A NATIVE DANCE
The patio of the Federal Department of Education Building.



Courtesy of Pan American Union

A PATIO OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION BUILDING IN MEXICO CITY
SHOWING FRESCOES BY DIEGO RIVERA

and to legislate in matters relating to them. In general, the Federal schools supplement those maintained by the States, and there are at the present time three separate systems existing side by side apparently without conflict or serious overlapping—the Federal, the State, and the municipal. Of the last there are few. The Federal rural schools have been increasing rapidly year by year in the past seven years, outnumbering at the present time by several thousand the State rural schools. More and more they are setting the pace for State schools in organization, curriculum, and progressive methods of teaching.

The Secretaría de Educación Pública includes 26 different subdivisions, representing as many different offices, functions, or services to the Federal school system. A graphic representation of the organization of the Secretariat presented in *Noticia Estadística sobre la Educación Pública en México Correspondiente al Año de 1928* (Statistical Information on Public Education in Mexico for the Year 1928), the official annual report of the Secretariat, indicates the functions and relative administrative status of the several component divisions which constitute the Secretariat. At the head are the "superior offices," namely, the Secretaryship, Subsecretaryship, and Chief Clerkship. An affiliation is indicated in this graph with the National University, which, however, became autonomous in 1929.

Immediately under the supervision of the Secretary are seven major divisions, known as departments, and eight minor divisions, called directorships, sections, or inspections. The major departments are: Department of Libraries, Department of Fine Arts, Department of Primary and Normal Instruction, Administrative Department, Department of Rural Schools, Department of Technical Instruction, and Department of Psychopedagogy and Hygiene. The minor divisions are editorial directorship, directorship of cultural missions, directorship of secondary education, directorship of archaeology, national student chest of savings and loans, technical section of special student statistics, general inspection and construction, and educational extension by radio.

Under the Department of Administration and of similar rank to the eight minor divisions referred to are eight divisions, all of which are called sections. They are: Personnel section, section of accountancy, section of supplies, section of archives, storehouse section, section of school lunches, section of school buildings, and section of routing and control.

The names of the various divisions of the Secretariat indicate the functions assumed by each. Some interesting services will be noted not usually assumed by Federal or State education offices in the United States. Textbooks are furnished and school and public libraries promoted by the Federal Secretariat, as indicated in the outline of divisions. The importance of archæology in the department is suggested by statements elsewhere in this bulletin concerning the schools' efforts to encourage racial pride among the population.

The section of special student statistics is responsible for promoting interest in improving types and manner of keeping statistical data relating to attendance and student personnel. A special record is kept in the rural schools for indigenous students showing the specific "race" to which they belong. Record forms for these schools include separate space for enrollment of adults as well as of children. Attendance records are kept for two days of the week, i. e., Monday and Thursday separately for boys and girls and for men and women. For the former a 6-grade classification is provided; for the latter, three grades only. Age classification for children provides for two groups only; one includes children 6 to 14, and the other, children over 14 years old.

The annual report to which reference is made above shows the distribution of Federal money appropriated to the Secretariat. Since this bulletin is concerned especially with the Departments of Primary and Normal Instruction, Rural Schools, and Secondary Education, and somewhat with the Department of Technical Education, as this department cooperates with rural schools in the teaching of agriculture, it is of interest that (in 1928) 71 per cent of the total budget of the office was devoted to these services, as follows: Primary and Normal Instruction, 39 per cent; Rural Schools, 17 per cent; Technical Education, 11 per cent; and Secondary Education, 4 per cent.

The Secretariat is located, as are the other Government departments, in the capital city. It is housed in a dignified and commodious building designed for and devoted exclusively to Federal activities in education. It is one of the most interesting and impressive of the several Federal buildings, and because of this fact, and the very general interest in the work being carried on, has become one of the attractions of the city. It is built around a central court or patio. Mural decorations in the corridors surrounding the patio are by Diego Rivera, Mexico's leading artist, well known in the United States, especially since

he has recently decorated a number of public buildings in some of our cities. The murals represent an historical pageant based on the revolution of 1910.

The use of the central patio for the production of school plays and festivals is an example of the place the building holds in the minds of school officials and the public. The court lends itself to the staging of school plays and traditional dances. The patio is so frequently used for entertainments by schools from all parts of the country that it has been called the mother of school theaters. The building houses also a permanent exhibit of art and handicrafts produced in the schools.

Administration and Supervision

The Federal rural schools are under the direction and supervision of a subdivision of the Secretariat known as the Department of Rural Schools and Incorporation of Indigenous Culture into Mexican Life. It is in charge of a director of rural schools, an appointee of the Secretary of Education. This department has quarters in the Federal Education Building and a force of assistants for whose work the director is responsible. He cooperates with the other subdivisions of the Secretariat and with other Government departments which assist in certain phases of school work. Within the Secretariat such relationships are particularly close with the Department of Primary and Normal Instruction and with the Bureau of Cultural Missions. The Department of Education works hand in hand with the Departments of Health and Agriculture.

The Federal rural school organization extends into each of the States through State and local school officials appointed by the central Federal authorities and responsible to them. In each State there is a Federal education officer responsible for the general supervision of Federal schools within his State. States in turn are organized into districts, which correspond roughly to our counties, each with a Federal school official in charge. The plan contemplates a complete organization of Federal supervision from the central office extending into each local district and affecting all Federal rural schools as they are established. The State directors are responsible for unifying and improving the work of the district supervisors, while the Federal officials at the central office, cooperating with the State inspectors and the cultural missions, aim to improve the

whole organization through the promotion of visitation, conferences, working committees, institutes, professional reading, and other supervisory measures resembling those familiar to educators in the United States.

The district supervisor in Mexico is the representative of the Federal Secretariat in his district and is held responsible for the efficient functioning of the schools under his direction. As such he is clothed with considerable authority and given the confidence of his supervisory officers and much liberty of action in the conduct of school affairs of his district. He is mainly responsible for the selection and placement of teachers and may even suspend teachers for serious misdemeanors. He is jointly responsible with the teachers for initiating and carrying out school and community projects. His success, however, depends on his ability to lead and to work harmoniously with the community, especially with its school committee. Preservation of the unity of school and community is indeed one of the objectives of the Federal program in education and as such one of the supervisor's most significant responsibilities. He reports regularly to and keeps in close personal touch with the State supervisor of Federal schools, who in turn reports to the central office.

Administrative details seem to be less exacting and to consume less of the supervisor's time than is common in school systems in the United States. This appears to be due in part to the simplicity of the program in buildings and equipment and to the fact that the agreement between the local community and the Federal Government by which schools are established fixes quite definitely their respective responsibilities. The community supplies buildings and equipment; the Federal Government, textbooks and teachers' salaries. The willingness of officials to permit a program to evolve as a result of successful experience rather than to impose a standardized program conceived in advance, also reduces administrative details for supervisors. Much responsibility for the administration of local school and community projects is borne by the teacher and by community committees appointed for the purpose. The functions of the district supervisor which have come to be accepted by the people and the Federal Government are concerned with stimulative leadership, direction and inspection, and supervision of instruction.

The local districts are adapted in size and in number of schools to reasonably intensive supervision of the instructional

program. Not only is frequent visitation possible for the supervisor, but frequent meetings of small groups of teachers are facilitated by the plan of district supervision, so that informal discussion groups for the consideration of local community problems can be held, as well as district meetings more formally conducted and more general in character.

The district supervisor is definitely responsible to central education authorities for attending and cooperating with the annual institute for teachers in his district and for coordinating his supervisory work for the succeeding year with the policies and practices initiated at the institute by the mission staff. Some district supervisors become members of the institute staff during the session in their districts.

An important supervisory agency is available in the Federal demonstration and observation schools, one of which is located in each State. These schools are established in part for experimental purposes, but chiefly to set standards for Federal and State schools and to demonstrate progressive practices in education in the States in which they are located. They are under the direction of the respective State directors of Federal schools.

A description of supervisory practices in one representative district visited will illustrate what, judging from considerable observation, is quite general practice. Certain local adaptations and emphases are, of course, inevitable. The supervisor in question emphasized the improvement of instruction. The objectives of the program as stated by him were better techniques of teaching, improvement of school organization, improved community work, and keeping and using good types of records and reports. Three days of this supervisor's week are devoted to group meetings in the respective sections. The other three days are for school visiting. Office routine and administration are apparently reduced to a minimum, since they are taken care of in this particular district during evenings and Sundays. The rural schools have a 6-day week. The district employs approximately 100 teachers, organized into groups corresponding to geographical sections of the district, in each of which teachers can conveniently meet with the supervisor at regular and frequent intervals—generally once a week. The meetings continue throughout one day, the day's program beginning with a demonstration lesson. This lesson may be taught by a teacher, the purpose being to secure the criticisms and suggestions of the group. It may be taught for

the purpose of demonstrating good practice, in which case the supervisor or a superior teacher he selects conducts the demonstration. Discussion follows the lesson in charge of a teacher or of the supervisor.

Other subjects for consideration on a typical program in this district include the use of and methods of keeping records and reports; improving professional techniques; special individual and community problems with discussions as to methods of meeting them. The day's program includes one period devoted to questions concerned with teachers' organizations; improving working conditions, salaries, or similar matters of concern and interest to the group. This period is managed by the organization itself (the *sindicado*) rather than the inspector.

Other Activities

Other interesting departments of the Secretariat are those of fine arts, of psychopedagogy and hygiene, of school libraries, and extension of education by radio. Each of these has important cooperative relationships with the Department of Rural Schools in the promotion of its program while carrying on its own specific work. The activities relating to rural schools of the two subdivisions of the Secretariat most closely concerned with the rural-school program, namely, the Department of Primary and Normal Instruction and the Bureau of Cultural Missions, are described elsewhere. The former maintains, in addition to activities described, an interesting connection with the general supervision of elementary schools carried on by the Federal District supervisors and is responsible for courses in supervision offered in the national summer school for teachers.

The Department of Fine Arts promotes and supervises instruction in music, physical education, and drawing and practical arts. The People's Night School of Music was established by this department to provide the laboring classes with cultural opportunities. Concerts in which glee clubs, orchestras, and dancing classes participate are held in public parks and halls, and courses in singing, in piano, and other instruments are offered. The Bureau of Drawing and Practical Arts, a subdivision of the Secretariat, directs open-air schools of painting. It works closely with the Department of Rural Schools in designing and supervising decorations for school fairs, entertainments, stage settings for open-air theaters, and other art work required from time to time by the Secretariat of Education.

The Department of Psychopedagogy and Hygiene is concerned with the mental and physical development of pupils. Under its direction tests are administered to children of all ages, and results are utilized to improve classification of pupils, teaching methods, and educational conditions in general. For improvement of the physical development of Mexican children the department conducts clinics, furnishes medical inspection for schools, inspects buildings, grounds, and equipment, and furnishes school breakfasts to thousands of undernourished children.

The Department of School Libraries promotes establishment of local libraries in schools and in communities, offers resident and correspondence courses in library science, and maintains a library for the Secretariat of Public Education as well as an annex library in the Federal District, largely for the benefit of teachers. The establishment of libraries in rural communities is recognized as of momentous importance. It is the purpose—as yet attained only in part—to have a small library in every rural school for the use of the community as well as for the teacher and the school.

The Bureau of Extension of Education by Radio serves schools and the general public. For schools, stories, readings, chorus songs, and children's games are broadcast. For the benefit of rural teachers special radio courses are prepared by the Department of Rural Schools. The programs offered for the interest of the public in general are for urban workers, rural workers, and housekeepers. The courses are designed to raise the economic level and to offer cultural opportunities for workers and housewives.

In their varied efforts the departments of the Secretariat, particularly that of the Department of Rural Education, aim rather at leadership of a stimulating type than toward the imposition of standards or the definite direction of activities. The purpose is to supplement educational facilities offered by State or other agencies—to increase quantitatively and improve qualitatively cultural opportunities offered, and especially to make them available to the masses of the people not heretofore adequately reached by public or private educational influences.

CHAPTER FIVE



SECONDARY SCHOOLS

THE new Federal education program in Mexico contemplates the provision of secondary education facilities which shall eventually be available to all children of secondary school age. At present secondary schools under Federal direction are established as a unit of the regular public-school system in cities chiefly. They reach a relatively small percentage of the children. Like the Federal rural-school system, the secondary schools are an outgrowth of postrevolutionary aspirations and policies.

Prior to 1917, secondary education consisted entirely of preparatory work leading to professional courses in the National University. This practice represented a generally accepted belief and policy that secondary education was for the privileged minority who contemplated professional careers or the leisurely life of the gentleman of wealth. The traditional prescribed 5-year course was given at the National Preparatory School, the *Preparatoria*—a unit of the National University in Mexico City. The type of instruction offered was formal and academic. The instructors were drawn almost wholly from the business and professional men of the community. They taught by the lecture method one or two hours a day or less on phases of the business or profession they pursued. The program was wholly inadequate from the point of view of the needs of modern life.

Changing Ideals

Since 1917, a gradual change has been taking place in the general understanding of the objectives of secondary education in a democratic country. Educational leaders in particular have been gradually coming to the conclusion that if democracy is to be achieved through education, secondary school facilities must be increased, to the end that opportunities available more nearly approach universality. They believe, furthermore, that secondary schools must be organized to offer a broader education preparing for life and all vocations rather than for professional careers solely.

However, in spite of changing ideals, as late as 1924 the National Preparatory School, still a unit of the National University, was the only public secondary school in Mexico City. Preparatory schools similar in type had been established in the other States and Territories. The courses offered were of both secondary and higher grade, without well-defined differentiation between the two. Courses were still preparatory to professional courses in the National University, and traditional offerings and methods largely prevailed.

Reorganization of Secondary Education

In 1926, decided changes took place. A subdivision of the Federal Secretariat, the Directorship of Secondary Education, became active in the extension and improvement of secondary education throughout Mexico. A presidential decree was issued to permit the incorporation into the Federal school system of all secondary schools complying with certain requirements. This opened a way for setting up standards and offered certain advantages to private secondary schools and students completing courses in them. Of still greater importance, the National Preparatory School was completely reorganized in both form and purpose. The first three years of secondary offerings were completely separated from the National Preparatory unit and transferred to and became a part of the public-school system as regularly established secondary schools. The last two years of the old 5-year course were retained to form the new type of preparatory school which continued to be a unit of the National University. The courses offered lead to entrance to the university proper. The 2-year preparatory courses are ex-

tended to three years when the type of preparation requires such extension.

Instructors in the National Preparatory School are still largely part-time teachers and the staff is still made up in large part of persons regularly engaged in the business and professional world. They are paid from school funds only for the time actually spent in school work. This is in part an economy measure. Teachers in secondary schools receive far higher salaries than in rural schools—as much as six to ten times as many pesos per day in some instances. Appropriate equipment is necessary, and secondary schools, therefore, are relatively expensive. However, the system has its advocates for efficiency reasons also. It is believed that there is added practical value when subject matter is presented by scientists, and business and professional men and women, who bring directly to the classroom the results of everyday experiences from the fields of their respective activities. Theory is less apt to be overemphasized, in the opinion of the advocates of the system.

New Secondary Schools

The new secondary schools now form a link in the Federal public-school system. Reasons for their establishment, as stated recently by officials of the Federal Secretariat of Education, are representative of the trends in thinking on educational matters in Mexico. They are: The recognition of the adolescent nature of the child of secondary school age; the need of provision for individual differences and a belief in the ultimate complete democratization of secondary instruction.

The secondary schools offer three years of work following completion of the six years of the elementary or primary school. They offer prevocational courses, are broadening and democratic in tendency, stress the teaching of subject matter through activities, emphasize the social studies, and encourage social participation throughout the course. They correspond, therefore, in age and grade of pupils enrolled and in purpose and offerings to the junior high school organizations familiar in school systems in the United States. Completion of the courses satisfies the entrance requirement to the National Preparatory and other similar preparatory schools.

The secondary schools are growing rapidly in number and in enrollment, testifying to their increasing popularity. In Mexico City the number of schools increased from one in 1926 to eight

in 1931; enrollment for the respective years increased from 3,000 to 10,500. Available facilities are inadequate at present to accommodate the children who apply for admission and who have fulfilled the entrance requirements. Secondary schools of the same or a similar type have been established in the other large cities of Mexico, from which similar increases in their popularity are reported.

Entrance to the secondary school is limited to those who, having completed the six years of the primary school, pass a satisfactory examination in language and arithmetic. The examination is followed by mental and achievement tests, administered more to determine the curriculum to be followed than as an entrance requirement. The examination probably acts as a check on excessive enrollments. However, as facilities improve and increase, examinations and tests as entrance requirements will, it is expected, be discontinued.

The secondary school faculties are made up of both full-time and part-time instructors; the latter generally predominate in number. The amount of time devoted to instruction by part-time instructors varies, depending on local conditions—including financial resources—and on the needs of the subjects they teach. Music and art, for example, are subjects commonly taught by part-time teachers, who spend one to three hours per week in the schools.

Textbooks are selected by committees of teachers and principals under the direction of the Department of Secondary Education. They include texts by Mexican educators, translations of standard foreign texts, and original foreign texts. Supplementary material is used freely and libraries are required in accredited secondary schools.

Activities

Curriculum offerings include¹ mathematics, 3 years; biological sciences, 3 years; geography, 3 years; physics and chemistry, 1 year each; general history, national history, and political economy, each 1 year; Spanish language and literature, 3 years; English, 2 years; drawing and modeling, 3 years; physical education, 3 years; singing, 3 years; "a trade," 1 year (compulsory for the first year); civics, 3 years.

¹ Sáenz, Moisés. *Reseña de la Educación Pública en México en 1927*. Publication of the Secretariat of Public Education, Vol. XVIII, No. 13, Mexico, D. F., 1928.

The activity principles followed in rural schools and the emphasis on "practical" subjects described in a preceding chapter are practiced also in the secondary schools. English is considered the most practical of modern languages for Mexicans and is a requirement for two years of the high-school course. There is a close tie-up between studies and observation through field trips, visits to shops, laboratories, etc. In the third year every pupil must become a member of at least three clubs and must perform at least ten acts of social service to the satisfaction of a committee chosen by the pupils. Activities outside the school are considered as important as classroom work. The subject matter of the several secondary-school curricula is analyzed and reorganized into activities. Reorganization is a cooperative project carried out by principals and teachers directed by the Federal education officials. Self-realization and self-expression, especially through art, music, and handwork, are encouraged. Modeling, drawing, music, and art are considered and taught as means of free expression.

A Representative School

A representative high school in Mexico City for girls—secondary schools are not coeducational—was observed during a regular and typical day's session. A brief account of the school and its origin and outlines, showing weekly schedules of four of the teaching groups into which the school is divided, are included as illustrative of general practice in secondary schools in Mexico under the new plan.

Secondary School No. 8 was not provided when plans for secondary-school buildings were made preceding the opening of the regular school year 1928. In its present form it is a result of an insistent demand for an education and of resourcefulness and initiative on the part of a determined group of teachers and pupils. Applicants for admission to the school building furnished for the girls of the section in which Secondary School No. 8 is located were far in excess of expectations and of preparations made in advance, and when school opening day arrived there were approximately 300 girls in excess of the capacity of the building. These applicants had fulfilled all entrance requirements. Additional accommodations were imperative, but no suitable school building and no equipment were available. As an initial step a principal was selected.

from the staff of the school in which the overflow occurred, a staff recruited, and an unoccupied residence in the neighborhood, commodious in size but badly in need of repair and in no sense adapted to school purposes, was assigned to the faculty and students. Of this they were to make a school. Very little in the way of funds for renovating and rebuilding purposes was available.

School sessions were begun, however, as soon as possible, and the work of reconstruction and repair proceeded along with regular class work. Through the efforts of the principal, teachers, and pupils, and with the help of a few workmen, including the janitor and caretaker, the building has been, in the three years of its occupation as a school, gradually transformed into a modern, attractive, and convenient school. In the beginning each girl brought her own chair and such other school equipment as her home afforded. Donations of various necessities came from homes and other sources. Gradually the old rooms were renovated and made into classrooms, additions were built, outbuildings improved and utilized, the grounds cleaned up and made beautiful with plantings and playgrounds. The open patio in the center of the building makes an excellent place for classes, in music—the piano is moved out for the music period—for physical education, and for art instruction. There are workrooms for modeling, sewing, cooking, and the like, as well as classrooms; an attractive and well-equipped library, and now (July, 1931) just opening when the school was visited, after much planning and sacrifice, a new swimming pool with showers, dressing rooms, lockers, and other modern equipment, the pride of the school and mainly the result of its own efforts.

The school enrolled in 1931 more than 500 girls. It offers the accepted 3-year course. The faculty includes the principal (the *Directora*), an assistant principal, and 12 full-time and 22 part-time teachers. About two-thirds of the part-time teachers conduct classes in the school an average of three hours a week. The others teach fewer hours a week. There are six days in the school week and five periods of one hour each in the school day. School opens at 8.30 in the morning and continues until 1.30 in the afternoon. There is a half-hour luncheon period.

The offerings in this school include mathematics—arithmetic, geometry, and trigonometry; science—botany, physics, chemistry, geography, zoology, hygiene; language—English and Spanish; civics; history, general, and history of Mexico; Spanish

literature. Civics and social activities receive special attention, as in other Mexican secondary schools. An interesting example of a project conducted in this school as part of its social program is concerned with supplying annually to one of the city hospitals a certain number of layettes for indigent mothers. They are made by the girls in their regular classes. Manual work extends throughout the three years of the course and includes sewing, cooking, housekeeping, modeling, and Mexican handwork. Music and sports are offered throughout the three years. Some choice among offerings is possible beginning with the first year.

Freedom of choice is promoted somewhat through student groupings, which, while primarily for facility in organization, are based also on students' choices among electives. Weekly schedules are made up for each group for each month of the school year. For one first year reasonably typical group the schedule is as follows: From 8 to 9 a. m., botany, Monday, Wednesday, Friday; drawing, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday; from 9 to 10 a. m., geography, Monday, Wednesday, Saturday; work (selected types), Tuesday, Thursday, Friday; from 10 to 11 a. m., recreation, Monday, Thursday; Spanish, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday; mathematics, Saturday; from 11 to 11.30 a. m., luncheon; from 11.30 a. m. to 12.30 p. m., mathematics, Monday, Tuesday, Friday; study period, Wednesday, Thursday; modeling, Friday; from 12.30 to 1.30 p. m., music, Monday; English, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday; civics, Wednesday, Friday.

It will be noted that mathematics occurs four days of the week in the schedule for this group as it does for other groups not described here. English and Spanish usually have three hours each per week. Music, art, drawing, and types of handwork vary in number of periods per week among groups. All have at least one period of music. All have recreation periods. All have handwork three or more periods a week, whether lacquer work, Mexican embroidery, modeling, cooking, or another one of the offerings provided.

The school keeps a complete file of individual records for students on uniform record forms furnished by the Department of Secondary Schools. These forms provide for the usual attendance record for each subject in which the student enrolls and for "qualification," grades and conduct marks in each subject. In addition certain personal information—height, weight, occupation, and residence of parent and photograph of the student—is included on each record sheet.

Some Federal Activities

The secondary education department in the Federal Secretariat is active not only in stimulating the extension of secondary education but in improving it. The movement now under way to standardize and accredit offerings in secondary schools is raising standards generally and directing secondary-school work into approved and acceptable channels. Objectives of secondary education as approved by the department are both preparatory and terminal in character—courses lead to "further study or prepare for life's work." Minimum standards set up for accredited schools concern term length, class hours, equipment, teachers' salaries and qualifications, and supervision. The department is responsible also for setting up entrance requirements to secondary schools. They include examinations and standardized tests. The latter are formulated and administered by members of the staff of the department or by supervised assistants.

CHAPTER SIX



SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

OF THE MANY

interesting aspects of federally supported education observed in Mexico, sometimes supplemental to and sometimes directly integrated with the regular schools, there are a few which seem of special interest. Probably the outstanding characteristics of all of them are their simplicity, practicalness, and freedom from formality. They are unpretentious as to administrative organization and equipment and free from rigid, formal requirements as to entrance qualifications or accomplishments. A need is recognized—national, regional, or community; there are individuals with some ability or with special talents, real or potential, and there is a school. The instructor may be only a little in advance of his students in the field selected, but he has certain qualities of leadership—they can learn together. On the other hand, he may be especially talented in his field—as in the free schools of painting where gifted individuals often serve as full-time or part-time instructors.

Vocational Training

In Mexico City and in a number of the larger centers outside the Federal District, technical, industrial, and commercial schools have been developed to train for the prevailing local trades and industries. They are under the supervision of the Department of Technical, Industrial, and Commercial Instruction of the Federal Secretariat of Education. They are generally of secondary grade, although entrance requirements are less formal than for the Federal secondary schools proper. Teachers generally are selected with reference to their ability and experience, though some of the instructors of the minor crafts and domestic economy are chosen because of expertness in these particular lines of work rather than academic achievement. Both entrance requirements for students and standards of qualifications of teachers are being studied with a view to revision. There are both night and day classes.

The schools offer direct and practical training for specific vocations. Some schools specialize in a particular trade or industry for which they are especially well equipped as to teachers, tools, machines, and the like. They are usually selected for specialization also because they are conveniently located with reference to the specialty selected, probably having ready access to a particular factory or plant with which cooperative relations are established. Not only technical or industrial mastery is the objective, but also modern methods of using it, including information concerning markets, desirable factory sites, sources of raw materials, transportation costs, and foreign merchandise customs and duties. Along with the specialized subjects of the schools, related academic courses are offered. Cooperation with department stores and industries has been worked out successfully, so that not only are positions filled from the schools but the products of the students in training are disposed of by department stores operated by or in cooperation with the schools. After the cost of the articles sold is deducted a percentage allowance goes to the students who made them.

In certain of the small communities *escuelas de artes y oficios*, resembling somewhat, as the name implies, some of our own smaller schools of practical arts, have been established. They offer definite vocational training for certain selected trades or crafts, usually regional, during the primary and secondary school years.

In one such school observed, probably reasonably representative of other similar ones, upward of 100 children were enrolled, ranging from 6 to 18 years of age. Equipment was of the simplest kind so far as machinery is concerned, but ample for the standards of the neighborhood. It included such tools as were used by the most skilled workmen in the community. There was a leather shop from which elaborate hand-tooled saddles and harness were turned out, as well as simpler ones. Shoes, of the type used in the United States and Mexican sandals; belts, and other kinds of leather articles were made for the pupils' own use and for sale. Repair work was carried on also in the leather shop.

One long room of the building was devoted to weaving, and several looms were in operation. Pupils wove towels of attractive designs. Most of the towels were sold to provide a considerable part of the school's income. The machine shop was a practical farm repair shop equipped with a forge, anvil, and other simple tools of the kind commonly used in the neighborhood. The boys were repairing machinery brought in from neighboring farms and homes. This repair shop was not only a source of income to the school, but rendered important service to the region. Under the direction of the trained instructor-workmen, the school provided a knowledge of machinery and a type of service not afforded elsewhere in the community. Carpentry and home-making courses, especially cooking and sewing, of an equally practical nature, were among others offered. The related academic subjects—music, physical education, and drawing—were other basic offerings in the school curriculum.

Residence Schools

Boarding schools for Indians, called residence schools in Mexico, are not favored except for specific purposes or needs. Present policies for integrating and incorporating the Indian population are based on the theory that schools are primarily community institutions. The program must be carried on as a community project designed to raise the social and economic level of the group as a whole. It must reach adults as well as children. Segregating individuals, transplanting them from the home community during childhood and early youth, is not in harmony with these accepted policies.

Exceptions to this general practice are made in certain unusual situations or for special purposes. The exceptional situa-

tions and purposes so far recognized are served by four residence schools for rural Indians, one national and three regional in clientele. They were established by and are under the general supervision of the Department of Rural Education of the Federal Secretariat.

The first residence school established was the *Casa del Estudiante Indígena* (the House of the Indian Student), located in one of the suburban sections of Mexico City. It was founded at the instigation of Dr. Puig Casauranc, later Secretary of the Federal Secretariat of Education, and now ambassador to the United States, and was sponsored by President Calles during his administration as an experiment and a demonstration. Many people of the educated class in Mexico believed that a useless expenditure of time and money would be involved in any concerted, nation-wide effort to educate Indians, which was the proposed plan of a new administration. Those who believed in democracy in education favored a nation-wide school system and felt sure that the Indians, if given an opportunity, would prove their ability to profit by education to the same extent as other Mexicans. The school was opened, then, in part to demonstrate the ability of primitive Indians to profit by academic and vocational training, and in part as an experiment in the extent to which Indian students would be able to adjust themselves to civilized life economically and socially and eventually return to their home communities to act as leaders and teachers, promoting the incorporation program and introducing the ways of civilization which they had learned at school.

The student body is made up of upward of 200 Indians representing the 28 States of the Republic and 25 or more different native tribes speaking as many languages. They are exposed to the social and cultural influences which the capital city affords, including recreational, library, and museum facilities. They participate in civic and athletic gatherings; attend lectures, dramatic presentations, festivals, receptions; study shops, factories, and industrial centers of the city. They are encouraged to make friendly contacts with members of the different racial groups represented in the school, as well as with the mestizo and white population of Mexico and its environs.

The house itself offers attractive living conditions, modern hygienic facilities, good sleeping quarters, healthful food, recreation, and other necessities of civilized life. The school is primarily an agriculture and trade school. The students receive training in basic academic subjects at both elementary and sec-

ondary levels, and in agriculture, the industries of Mexico, the practical and fine arts. Physical training is compulsory. Students are required to assist in the work of upkeep involved in running the school and to care for their own rooms and clothing. In some cases boys residing in the home are matriculated into Federal schools, industrial plants, privately owned shops, factories, or business houses in Mexico City. They are given an opportunity to earn money in and out of school and are helped and encouraged to form habits of order and thrift.

Friends of the school believe that it has proved itself worthy as an integrating influence; that it has promoted understanding among representatives of many racial groups, as well as between whites and mestizos and Indians; that it has definitely established the educability of even the most primitive of the Indian groups; and especially that it has demonstrated their power of adjustment to new requirements and to a new environment. Educational and intelligence tests have established the fact that the Indians compare favorably in ability with the white and mestizo population of the country. The school has helped to make the Indians popular among certain groups previously completely indifferent and this has resulted in increased attention to their welfare.

It appears that the weakness of the residence school is not found in difficulties of adjustment to a new environment, but rather in a tendency of the students on completion of the courses to remain in the new environment rather than to return to the native community to work for its social and economic reconstruction. The Director of Rural Education in the Federal Secretariat feels that integration is being achieved best in social masses, or by communities, through the rural school, and that educating individuals one by one through the residence school is a slower and less satisfactory process. In remote, backward communities in which local schools may not be appreciated and understood the returning students of the residence schools assist the incorporation program.

Among the most interesting of the residence schools is that of San Gabrielito, located in the State of Guerrero, south of Mexico City and bordering on the Pacific Ocean. Because it is off the Mexican plateau, San Gabrielito is tropical in vegetation and climate. Here, 35 boys, under the leadership of a director and teachers selected and paid by the Federal Government, have established a school—*Casa del Internado Indígena de San Gabrielito* (The Residence House of Indian Students of San Ga-

brielito). The school is, as the name implies, literally their house. They made the materials from which it is built—the adobe bricks, the colorful red tiles for the roof—and with their own hands constructed the building. The work began in April, 1931, when the boys, ranging from 10 to 18 years of age, came together with their teachers, and in the following August was nearing completion. In Mexico, buildings and equipment are not essential to the beginning of a school. A teacher and a group of children are enough, and this school was no exception. In fact, it is rather an excellent exemplification of this new philosophy. The school opened and the building process began at the same time. Neither bond issue nor special tax was necessary.

The school of San Gabrielito was established to meet a very special need. There are in Mexico certain rather well-defined districts in which a skin disease known as *mal del pinta* is prevalent. Its cause has not yet been located. It manifests itself in a peculiar discoloration of the skin, but the victim is otherwise normal. The remote localities in which the disease prevails are naturally shunned by their neighbor communities and are therefore even more primitive. Schools have not been opened in these communities in any large numbers because teachers are not available. This particular residence school offers an opportunity for an education to the boys of neglected communities, and, through a cooperative arrangement with the Federal public health authorities, for medical treatment and care. Here health authorities carry on experiments and tests in the treatment of the disease—one long under observation and study in Mexico—under rather advantageous circumstances. So much progress in this direction has been made that there is reason to hope that eventually the boys from the school may return to their home communities not only educated but rehabilitated physically themselves and with a prospect of offering similar advantages to the communities. The school will fulfill also the added purpose of preparing teachers who, when they return, may open schools in their own home villages.

When the boys came to San Gabrielito they brought with them no money, no shoes, the one suit of clothes which they wore, and a blanket. The first task was to make beds. Each boy made his own, a cot resembling our army cots, but with woven matting instead of the familiar canvas cover. The next necessity was a change of clothing. Each boy made enough salable articles to purchase an additional suit. This was no easy task

in a land where handicraft articles have little sale value, but with the help of the teachers it was accomplished. Shoes, leather articles, pottery, hats, and chairs made of native materials brought returns. As a result each boy who welcomed the author on a visit to the school wore a clean cotton suit and the native homemade sandals.

Meanwhile the building went forward, together with the making of school equipment—benches, desks, chairs, the home equipment—dishes and cooking utensils, and with related instruction in Spanish and in the academic subjects. It is an attractive building, one story, stuccoed, painted white, with a fine red-tile roof. There is one large room with an apartment separated off for the director, and a separate kitchen in a lean-to at one end. The large room is living room, dining room, bedroom, shop, and schoolroom, even music room, since there is a school orchestra and a band.

The site was donated and includes 20 to 30 hectares of good farm land. It has been placed under cultivation by the boys of the school and will in the future furnish much of the food needed. There are five teachers paid by the Federal Government and an allowance from the Federal and State Governments of 12 pesos (4 to 6 dollars) per day for food. Products of the boys' handwork were in August steadily increasing in number and in sale. Money received from their sale will buy additional tools and equipment. Already the earnings of the schoolboys have purchased instruments for the orchestra and basket balls. A good basket-ball field has been prepared adjoining the building.

There are two other regional residence schools, which, like this one, are located in the heart of purely native population areas. The regional location and the particular site and its environment are selected with care, especially the latter, in order that it may be representative of conditions that prevail in the local communities from which students come. Housing, food, clothing, and the manner of living are all designed to raise prevailing standards, but gradually and in keeping with the practical possibilities of the resources of the respective communities. These precautions are taken in the hope that the schools will offer the advantages of a residence school and yet be free from the objectionable tendency of this type of school to wean its students permanently away from their native environment or to disqualify them for readjustment and service to it on their return.

Free Schools of Painting

Free schools of painting for both children and adults—sometimes open-air schools, often utilizing an available building—are more commonly located in cities, but are not unknown in the rural villages.

To these establishments the children and young people of the communities, preferably those of the poorer districts of Mexico and the Indian population, may come if they feel an inclination to paint. No questions are asked. There are no prerequisites. The theory is that only those with the inclination to paint will come and only those with talent will remain. The method can be summed up in three words—motivation, encouragement, and criticism. There is very little of the last element, as a matter of fact, because teachers understand that artistic creation, being by nature personal and subjective, can hardly be criticized, and again, that technique, being the servant of ideas and emotions, can not properly be made a subject of criticism.

The artistic work of Mexican children, especially in drawing and painting, has attracted widespread attention in recent years. Many students of art believe that they have potential artistic talent of the first magnitude. Certainly the educational system is trying to provide through the free schools of painting an opportunity for the development of this innate ability. There is also at least one school of sculpture similar in purpose in Mexico City. In addition to the vocational aim of utilizing the artistic talent of the Indians in handicraft and other productions, painting, drawing, and sculpture, offer them opportunities to express qualities which through centuries of poverty and oppression may have been repressed. The free schools of painting supplement the art work of the regular schools, giving further opportunity to children and adults who show special artistic talent.

Open-Air Theaters

One of the best examples of the genius of the teacher translated into a policy of the educational system is found in the open-air school theater. Early in 1930 an enthusiastic, socially-minded teacher conceived the idea of using the dramatic method of showing the evil effects of the excessive use of alcohol to his community. He himself wrote simple 1-act plays with this purpose in mind, and with his pupils constructed an unpretentious open-air theater for their production. Because of the success of the theater in achieving the purpose for which

it was intended, and with the encouragement of Federal school officials and others interested in social reconstruction, the open-air school-theater movement spread so rapidly that less than two years after the first one was opened there were between 3,500 and 4,000 theaters in as many rural schools.

The open-air theaters vary in type from a mere platform under the trees or a sylvan theater utilizing a natural background with semicircular benches built in Greek theater fashion to quite pretentious, even costly, theaters when one considers the communities by which they are established. A number of school theaters utilize the wall of an ancient church as a background. In many the stage and its settings are elaborately decorated in varied and colorful designs. The initiative and artistic taste of the teachers have, as one would expect, much to do with the style and pretentiousness of the little school theaters. Even the humblest of them represent community interest and effort, and often great sacrifice on the part of both teachers and community. They are an index to the fervor with which Indian communities respond to the new education and a testimony to the spirit of service which characterizes even the least prepared of the teachers.

The open-air theater is especially well adapted to the nature of the people and to natural conditions in rural Mexico. The people live largely in the out of doors, love the soil, and are in tune with nature. "We know the secret of the desert; the ponderous legend of the mountain; the luscious tale of the jungle," says Professor Sáenz. For generations the recreational activities, the fiesta, even many of the traditional sacrifices, have been held largely out of doors. Through the open-air theater education avails itself of the instinctive love of the people for out-of-door festivities. The mild climate, the availability of picturesque sites, and the negligible cost are favorable factors. Community recreational activities are encouraged in the educational program both as a means of fostering community solidarity and of raising standards of taste for healthful and wholesome recreation. The cultural missions work directly with the people as well as with teachers to these ends. Each staff includes an instructor in "the popular arts," including art, music, and drama, and a director of physical education. The open-air theaters are practical means of utilizing and making permanent the outcomes of their instruction during the institutes. Music, art, and drama are means of expression to which the Mexican Indian apparently responds with a natural

ease and enthusiasm which need relatively little technical direction. With reasonable guidance, then, the school theaters may help materially to the achievement of higher standards in recreational activities.

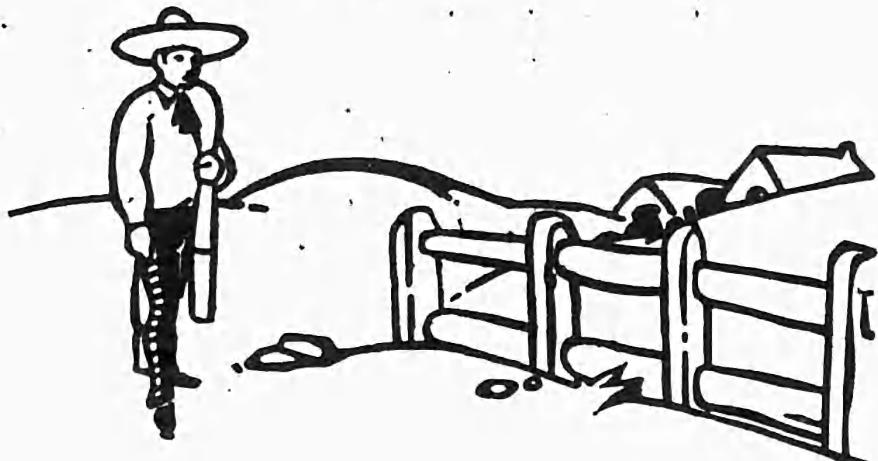
But the theater is also an educational device and a means of spreading propaganda which the teachers deem essential to community welfare. "We give puppet plays," writes one of the leaders of a cultural mission, to the Federal department, "and in that way we have got before the people a great part of the welfare campaign. I have just written a piece to give the first time the open-air theater is used. It is called *El que a los treinta no es rico a los cuarenta es borrico* (He who is not prosperous at 30 is out of it at 40). Also we have given two other plays, *Tierras y escuelas* (Land and schools) and *Lo que hacen los maestros* (What teachers do). From the title of the last one you will understand that it is a portrayal of the social work of the teachers. I took as a theme the life of this community itself, its customs, its ideals, its speech, and even its social and moral ills, to give from the stage a lesson which would reach and touch the hearts of the people. The rural teachers will be the actors and also some of the people."

Puppet plays, at which the teachers and children are unbelievably skilled, have a large place in the open-air theater. Native music; native dances, in the revival of which there is considerable interest in Mexico; plays based on the everyday life of the people, on the revolution, and on Mexican folklore, are other fields in the revival of which there is much interest. Many of the plays used are written by the teachers. Mimeographed copies of such plays are distributed by the Federal Department of Education for use in their exact form or to suggest the preparation of other plays. A booklet of plays especially designed for the use of the open-air theaters and written by more skilled authors is available also for general use in the schools. At present a staff member of the department is at work studying the open-air theater situation with a view to compiling a number of plays suitable for production by the schools. The results of this study will doubtless be published and distributed by the Government, adding to the available literature and doubtless suggesting new and additional functions which the open-air theater can perform.

So the open-air school theater in at least half of the communities served by rural schools is as much a part of the school program as is the school garden, the playground, the flower

garden, the school drug store, or the adult evening classes. It fills a real need, too, for the more definite community activities, such as concerts of the adult village band; few, if any, villages are without at least one band. To the small string orchestra, the recreation clubs widely fostered among children and youth, the theater offers a setting and an incentive for increased recreational and educational activities, substituting for prevailing ones of a less desirable type.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y



8

FOR those interested in further readings concerning Mexico's Federal educational program or concerning the education of indigenous and minority groups, a brief list of selected references follows. With three exceptions—articles referred to in this bulletin—only those available in English are included. The books or articles to which reference is made in the bulletin are indicated by an asterisk.

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